

GARRISON KEILLOR READS FOUR HUNDRED POEMS AND LIKES ONE

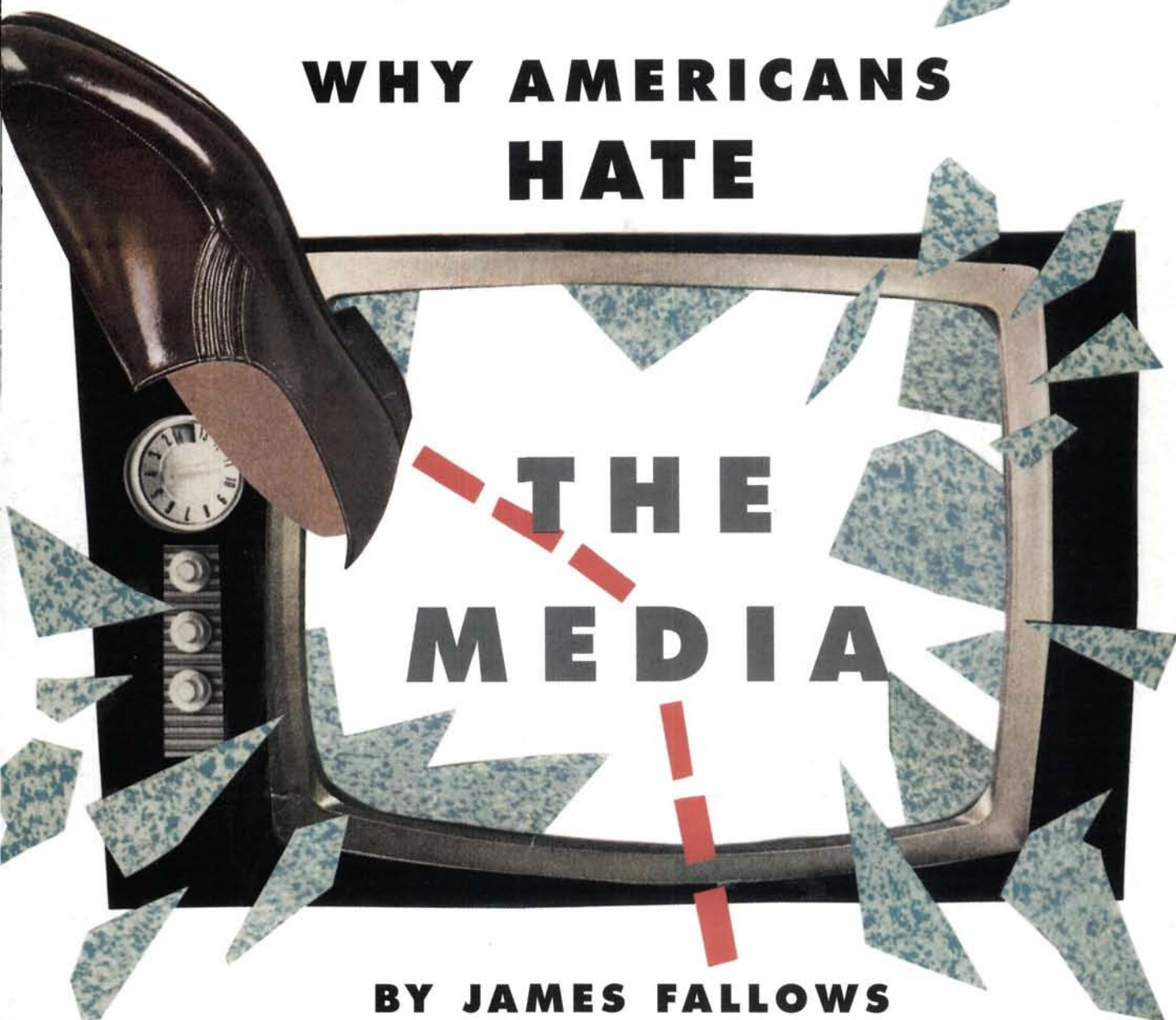
The Atlantic Monthly

FEBRUARY 1996

**WHY AMERICANS
HATE**

**THE
MEDIA**

BY JAMES FALLOWS



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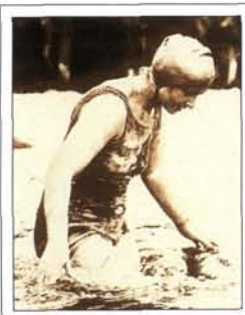


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A History of

The history of the Rolex Oyster has been closely allied not only with watchmaking achievements but also with some of history's greatest human accomplishments. Wherever and whenever people have tested the best in themselves, pushed the edge of the envelope, the limits of speed and endurance, Rolex is likely to have been with them. And what makes Rolex so remarkably dependable today is that just as those who have constantly sought to improve their performance, so have we.

1914: Just ten years after the founding of the company, Rolex is certified as the first wristwatch to outperform the pocketwatch by the Kew Observatory.



1926: Rolex invented the rugged Oyster case and the screw-down winding crown, developed on the same principle as the submarine hatch. The reliability of the Oyster was proven when, in 1927, Mercedes Gleitze swam the English Channel in 15 hours and 15 minutes. Her

Rolex Oyster successfully timed her swim.



The Twinlock winding crown.

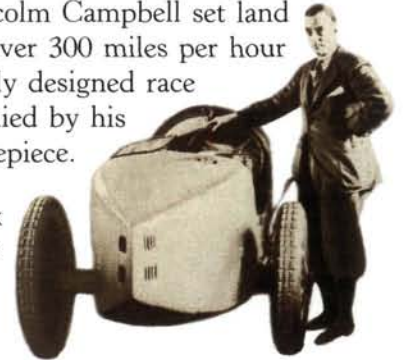
The screw-down winding crown that was created in 1926 has evolved over the years into what is known today as the Twinlock winding crown, pressure-proof to 330 feet. The Triplock winding crown is pressure-proof to 1,000 feet on the Submariner and 4,000 feet on the Sea-Dweller.

1931: Rolex continued to improve its mechanical timepieces, perfecting and patenting the self-winding wristwatch. This was made possible by the invention of the first perpetual rotor automatic mechanism, the Rolex Oyster Perpetual.



1935: Sir Malcolm Campbell set land speed records of over 300 miles per hour in his specially designed race cars, accompanied by his Rolex timepiece.

1945: Rolex created the Datejust, the first pressure-proof, automatic wristwatch chronometer that showed the date in a small "window" on the face of the watch.



1947: World War II flying ace Chuck Yeager, wearing his Rolex Oyster Perpetual, breaks the sound barrier. Yeager was only 24 years old at the time.



1953: Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay are the first to conquer Mt. Everest. The expedition's teamwork was synchronized on Rolex timepieces.

Rolex created the first pressure-proof, automatic timepiece, the Oyster Perpetual Submariner, certified to 300 feet. Today's Submariner runs even deeper, and is certified to 1,000 feet.



1960: Dr. Jacques Piccard breaks the world record with a 35,000-foot deep-sea dive in the Pacific Ocean with a Rolex Oyster strapped to his bathyscaphe. This historic watch resisted over a ton of pressure per square inch.

1971: Rolex creates the Sea-Dweller, the first diving watch in the world with a helium escape valve that allows the expanding gases within the case to be released during the diver's ascent to prevent explosive decompression of the watch.

Performance.



*The Wahiba Sands Expedition
in the Sahara.*

1986: The Royal Geographical Society scientists studying Wahiba Sands in the Sahara rely on Oyster timepieces to withstand desert sand and extremes of temperature.

1994: With his third win at Le Mans and his tenth endurance championship, Hurley Haywood breaks his own record set in 1991 as the race car driver with the most endurance wins.

Yesterday becomes today.



*Steve Wand at the
controls of the
Concorde simulator.*

Since its founding, Rolex has continued to set extraordinarily high standards for all of its timepieces. They have been improved internally hundreds of times. Yet the GMT-Master II, worn today by Concorde pilot Steve Wand, looks, to the untutored eye, remarkably like the Rolex Oyster worn for over 25 years by Brian Trubshaw, who wore his as a Concorde test pilot in 1969.

Trubshaw's Rolex is reliable not only for the extraordinary engineering and quality of the materials that go into creating an Oyster, but also for the care that is taken in testing each Rolex timepiece.

First, each Rolex Oyster is rigorously tested at Rolex, then sent to an independent Swiss Institute, the Contrôle Officiel Suisse des Chronomètres.

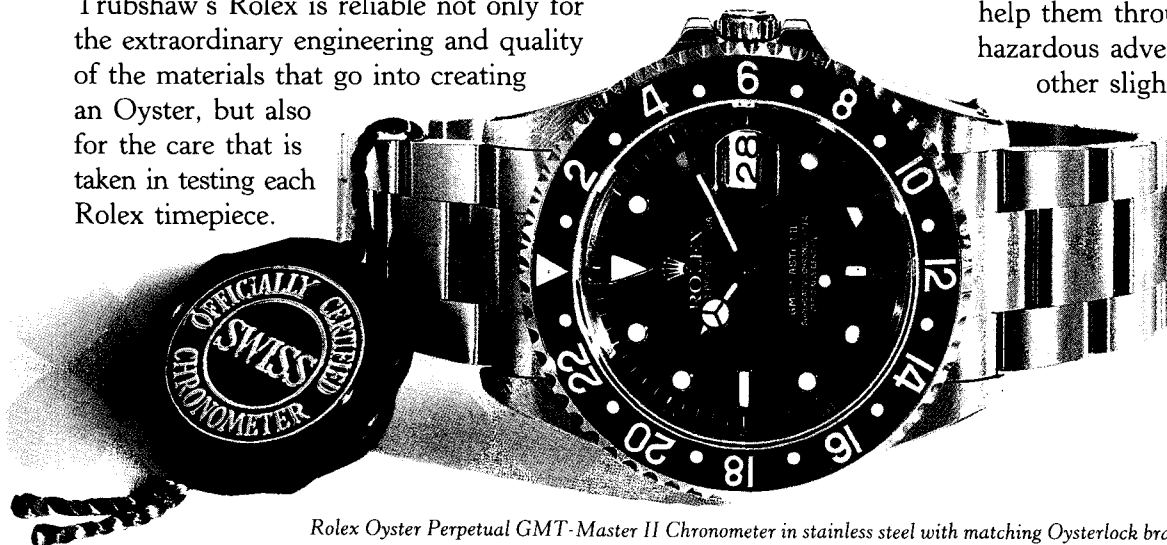
There, each watch must successfully undergo fifteen days and nights of additional testing before it is awarded the prestigious red seal that signifies it is an Official Swiss Chronometer.

This painstaking process helps to explain why so many people today continue to count on the reliability and durability of Rolex. From conservationists like Dr. George Schaller working



*Robert Anderson, making the first successful ascent of the west face,
reaches the peak of Vinson Massif, Antarctica, via Rolex Ridge.*

on the Chang Tang in Tibet to scientific teams crossing the Kimberley range in Australia. From divers like George Bass timing their ascents from the depths off Turkey to climbers like Robert Anderson challenging the heights of the world's tallest mountains. They rely on Rolex to help them through their often very hazardous adventures. As do many other slightly less-adventurous souls all over the world.




ROLEX

*Rolex Oyster Perpetual GMT-Master II Chronometer in stainless steel with matching Oysterlock bracelet.
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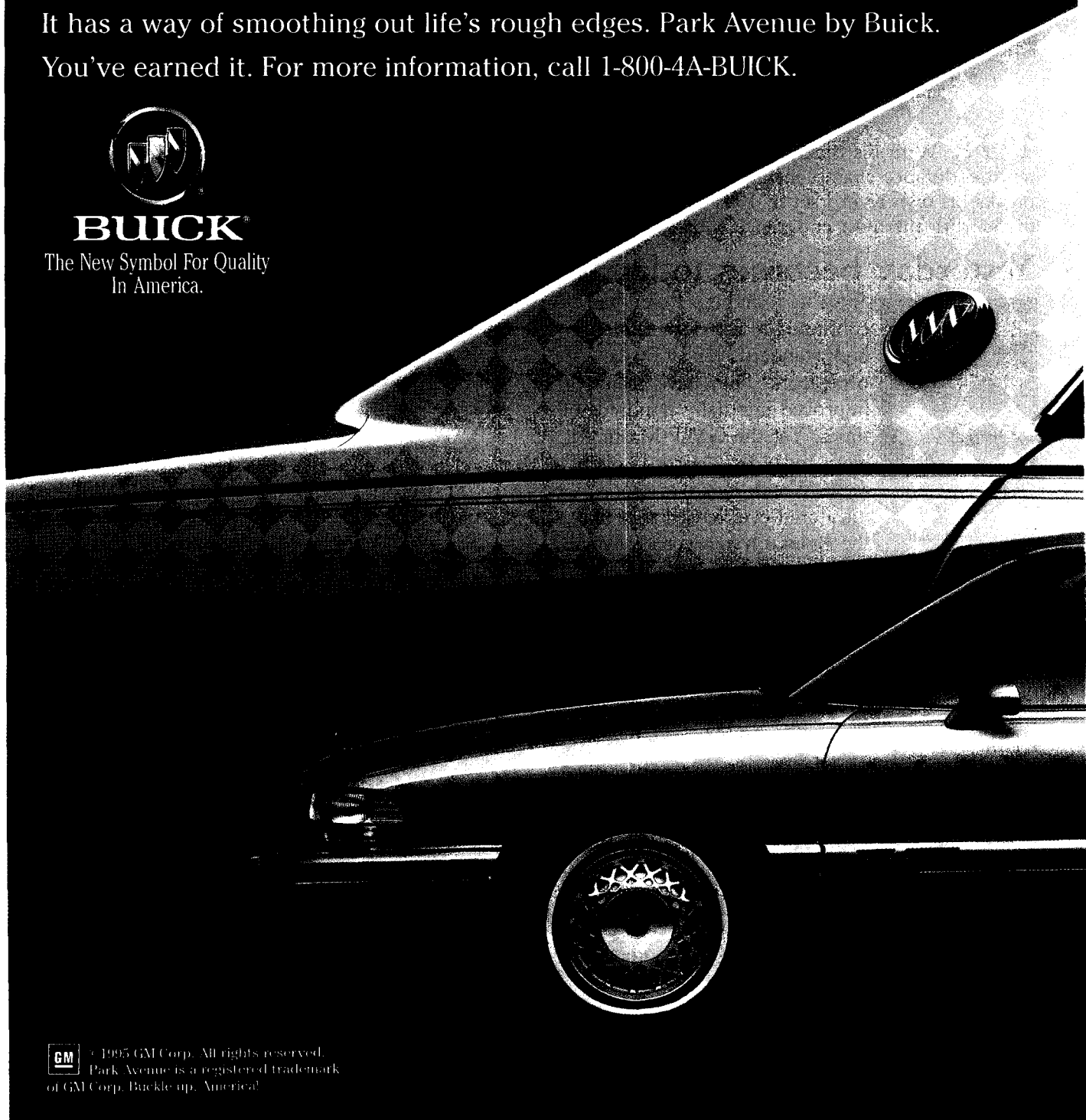
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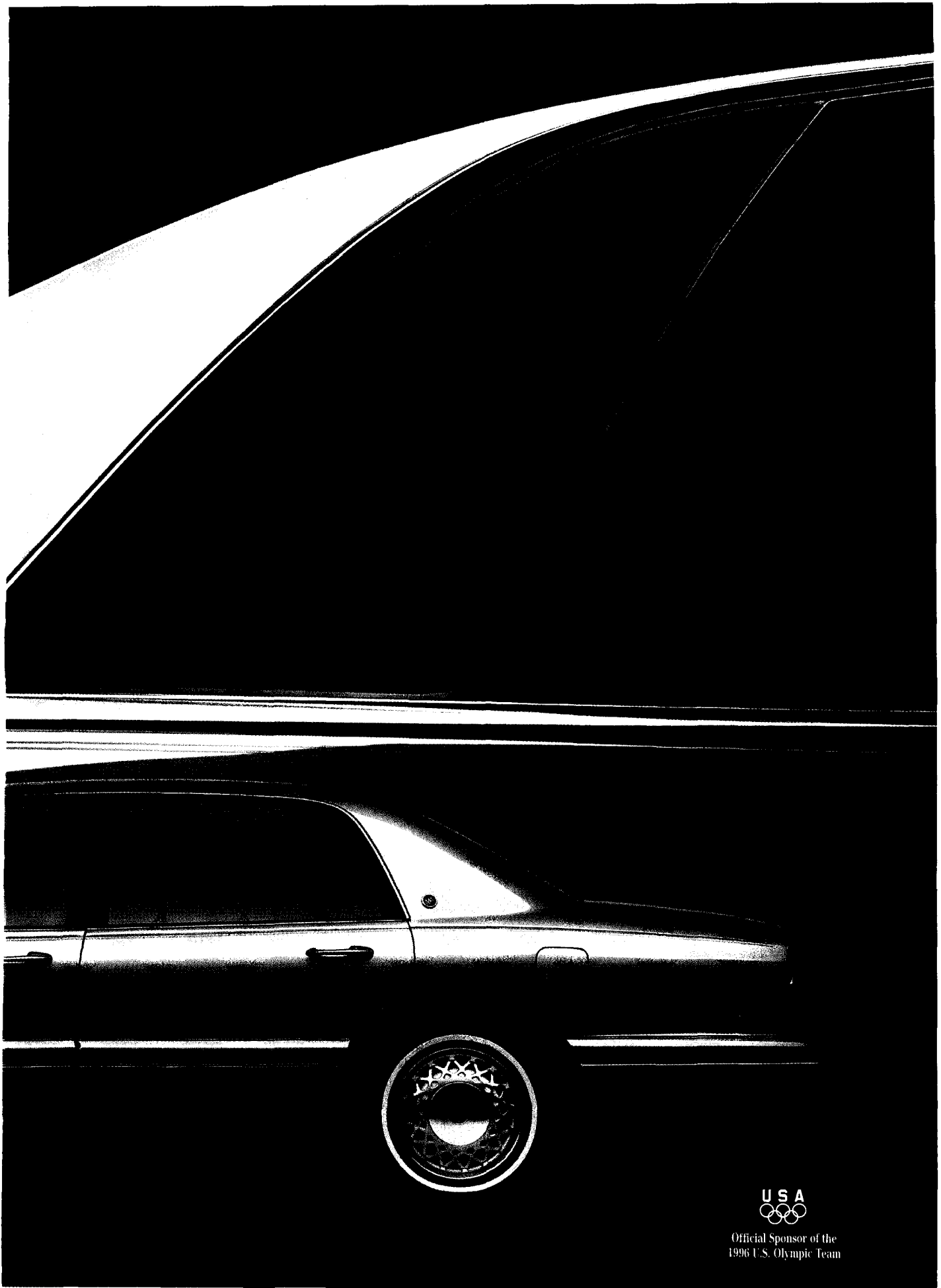


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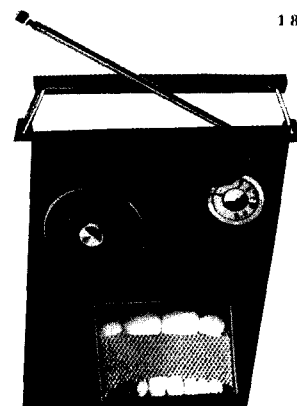




Page 19



Page 38



Page 45

REPORTS

16 Notes & Comment: Fair Trade

The resurgence of barter in a disorderly world.

by Cullen Murphy

19 Politics: Right-Wing Populist

For most of its history populism has been a phenomenon associated with the political left. Pat Buchanan's candidacy demonstrates how sharply populism has swerved.

by Steven Stark

30 Foreign Affairs: An Encore for Chaos?

Kenya has always been thought of as a country with a lot going for it. Is it now following its neighbors in a slide toward ethnic warfare and economic ruin?

by Bill Berkeley

HUMOR, FICTION, & POETRY

66 Albert and the Animals

A short story
by Marsha Rabe

71 The Body Mutinies

A poem
by Lucia Perillo

77 Salvage

A drawing
by Guy Billout

45 Why Americans Hate the Media

Treating politics as a game, ignoring the real issues, refusing to disclose potential conflicts of interest, spouting off on raucous political talk shows that not even the participants take seriously—these habits are jeopardizing the credibility of everything that journalists do.

by James Fallows

74 The Insufficiency of Honesty

Honesty is an essential component of the quality called integrity—but not the whole of it. What else does integrity require?

by Stephen L. Carter

79 Child Labor in Pakistan

The use of children for grueling labor in factory and field is widespread throughout the Third World—but nowhere more so than in Pakistan, where perhaps 11 million children toil in circumstances often not far removed from slavery.

by Jonathan Silvers



93 The Poetry Judge

A short story
by Garrison Keillor

BOOKS

106 The Alchemist's Retort

Infinite Jest, by David
Foster Wallace

by Sven Birkerts

108 A Gift for Dialogue

Five Screenplays by
Preston Sturges and Four
More Screenplays by
Preston Sturges, edited by
Brian Henderson

by Dennis Drabelle

113 Brief Reviews

by Phoebe-Lou Adams

ARTS & LEISURE

38 Travel: A Movable Feast

The author decides during a trip to France that traveling by barge is superior to any other manner of touring.

by Barbara Wallraff

98 Sport: The Precipitous World of Dan Osman

In which a noted climber displays his technique for falling from high places.

by Andrew Todhunter

OTHER DEPARTMENTS

6 745 Boylston Street

6 Contributors

10 Letters

14 The February Almanac

115 The Puzzler

by Emily Cox and
Henry Rathvon

116 Word Improvisation

by J. E. Lighter

Cover art by
Stephen Kroninger



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745 BOYLSTON STREET

IN the course of reporting for this magazine a number of writers have put their lives on the line. The circumstances have sometimes been the stuff of high geopolitical drama: Robert D. Kaplan's forays into war-torn Eritrea (July, 1988) and Afghanistan (September, 1988) come to mind. Other occasions have had more of an opéra-bouffe quality. Readers who missed James Fallows's account of his nauseating flight at speeds nearing Mach 2 aboard an F-15 (Fallows was taken aloft by an Air Force pilot after having criticized the F-15 in these pages) would do well to look up "I Fly With the Eagles," in the November, 1981, issue.

During the past decade and a half *Atlantic* authors have been shot at, have exposed themselves to exotic pathogens, and have criticized Camille Paglia. Andrew Todhunter, the author of "The Precipitous World of Dan Osman," has the distinction of being the first *Atlantic* contributor to jump off a cliff in pursuit of a story (or at least the first one to turn the story in). Todhunter, twenty-nine, has previously written about sea kayaking during winter storms (August, 1995) and scuba diving beneath the ice (January, 1994). His article in this issue is about one of the nation's most accomplished rock climbers, a man who de-

liberately falls from great heights and who initiated the author into the procedure.

"It's not about risk," Todhunter asserts. "That's not why I do any of these things. An adrenaline hit is exquisite, but far more than adrenaline—under the ice, in bad weather at sea, in the seconds following a free fall—the core experience is closer to losing oneself in something of great beauty."



Born in Paris, raised in New York, Colorado, and Washington, D.C., Todhunter worked as a laborer and spent six months camping at archaeological sites in Europe and Egypt before earning a degree in ancient history at the University of California at Berkeley. A writer and outdoorsman, he has spent much of the past twenty years sailing, scuba diving, skiing, surfing, kayaking, climbing, and caving. He admits that over the next decade, in addition to becoming "a passable fiddler, husband,

and cook," he would like to climb Denali, dive the wreck of the *Andrea Doria*, and paddle a kayak from Lake Nasser to the Mediterranean.

In the months ahead *The Atlantic* will no doubt be supporting some of Todhunter's other outdoor endeavors. The insurance he can take care of himself. —THE EDITORS

CONTRIBUTORS

Bill Berkeley ("An Encore for Chaos?") has been an Alicia Patterson fellow in Africa. He has previously reported for *The Atlantic* from Liberia, Zaire, Uganda, and South Africa. He lives in New York.

Sven Birkerts ("The Alchemist's Report") is the author of four books of essays, including *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (1993). He is editing an anthology titled *The Millennial Muse: Imagination in the Brave New World*, to be published this fall.

Stephen L. Carter ("The Insufficiency of Honesty") is the William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Law at Yale University and the author of *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (1994). Carter's article in this issue of *The Atlantic* is adapted from his book *Integrity*, to be published by Basic Books next month.

Dennis Drabelle ("A Gift for Dialogue") writes about fiction, movies, and

the environment. His reviews appear regularly in *The Washington Post*.

James Fallows ("Why Americans Hate the Media") is *The Atlantic*'s Washington editor. He is the author of *More Like Us* (1989) and *Looking at the Sun* (1994). Fallows's article in this issue of *The Atlantic* is taken from his book *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*, to be published this month by Pantheon.

Garrison Keillor ("The Poetry Judge") is the host of the Public Radio International show *A Prairie Home Companion*. His books include *Lake Wobegon Days* (1985), *Leaving Home* (1987), *WLT: A Radio Romance* (1992), and *The Book of Guys* (1993).

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Cullen Murphy ("Fair Trade") is the managing editor of *The Atlantic*.

Lucia Perillo ("The Body Mutinies") teaches creative writing at Southern Illinois University. Her poem in this issue of *The Atlantic* is the title poem of her new collection, to be published next month.

Marsha Rabe ("Albert and the Animals") is the director of publications at Southern Connecticut State University. Her articles have appeared in *The New York Times*. This is her first published fiction.

Jonathan Silvers ("Child Labor in Pakistan") is a writer and an independent television producer specializing in international affairs and human-rights issues.

Steven Stark ("Right-Wing Populist") writes about politics and popular culture and is a commentator on National Public Radio. He is completing a book about the most influential programs in television's history.

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LETTERS

Strawberry Fields

Thank you for Eric Schlosser's wonderful and poignant article "In the Strawberry Fields" (November *Atlantic*). His descriptions of the backbreaking work and miserable living conditions of migrant laborers should make us all ask ourselves what we are willing to pay for the free market. Schlosser writes eloquently about the harsh paradox of the wealth of Orange County and the poverty of illegal workers. He asks us to re-examine our worship of the almighty free market and the laws of supply and demand. Thank you for reminding us that "the market rewards only efficiency" and that "the free market always seeks a work force that is hungry, desperate, and cheap—a work force that is anything but free."

Kate Mahoney

Denver, Colo.

I spoke at length with Eric Schlosser during the preparation of "In the Strawberry Fields," and have a few comments. The article is interesting but inaccurate, and reflects Schlosser's use of data given to him by the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement.

The cases cited in the article are now three years old and are based on events that never occurred or on conditions that no longer exist.

Schlosser failed to disclose that I had made arrangements for him to speak with successful strawberry growers who have used Kirk Produce as their commission merchant for many years. He told me that he failed to follow through on these important interviews. He was to have met with these growers by himself and to have asked *any* questions he desired, either in person or on the telephone.

I made arrangements for the president of Kirk Produce to speak with Schlosser at a mutually convenient time. Schlosser never called to confirm a time for this important interview.

A commission merchant is paid on a per-tray-sold basis and does not share in the profits obtained by the grower. This is a set amount, not a percentage of sale. Schlosser might call this practice "share-cropping," but such a description is surely not apt. When was farming not a "roll of the dice," dependent on weather, market conditions, and many other factors?

From the market price growers must deduct the costs of sale to determine profit. These costs include labor, packaging, fertilizer, fumigation, plants, ground preparation, irrigation, fuel, utilities, strawberry-commission levy, possible transportation, insurance (both liability and workers' compensation), and many other costs both hidden and obvious. Bank or other loans and advances must also be deducted, and the remainder goes to the grower, who stands to make or lose money depending on the market. The commission merchant does not control market prices but always attempts to sell his principal's commodity for the highest price attainable—to carry out his fiduciary duties and to maintain the grower base. Consumers, including Schlosser, have historically demanded lower and lower prices for fruits and vegetables. They may not buy strawberries if they think the price is excessive.

Schlosser fails to mention the sworn Warranties of Labor Law Compliance that, I believe, were included in the contracts mentioned in the article. Each grower gives Kirk Produce its sworn assurances upon personal knowledge that all labor laws and regulations have been fully complied with relative to the produce delivered to Kirk Produce.

My impression is that Schlosser seeks to highlight only serious social and labor-law abuses by a very few growers in a labor-intensive, high-risk, highly regulated business participated in by hundreds of thousands of people in an assembly line from the farm to the table of the consumer.

Peter M. Gwosdof

Anaheim, Calif.



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The Atlantic Monthly

"In the Strawberry Fields" is distorted reporting and a vilification of an industry that is generally progressive and responsible. Your reporter was given substantial information—which he chose not to use—that could have led to a balanced report of a complex and challenging issue. Instead Eric Schlosser conveyed the stereotype that all farmers are abusive and all workers are abused. To say that the industry is founded on the availability of cheap, illegal labor is grossly unfair to the majority—responsible farmers who obey the laws, treat their workers with fairness and respect, and provide good working conditions.

The strawberry industry has been a longtime advocate of strict enforcement of labor laws in California. We publish bilingual handbooks containing the fundamental worker-safety and wage requirements to simplify huge and complicated legal codes. We conduct statewide bilingual seminars to educate farmers about California's stringent and ever-changing labor standards. And we conduct bilingual seminars for field supervisors on good management practices and fair treatment of employees. In addition, we have actively encouraged more-aggressive enforcement of the laws through meetings with state regulatory and elected officials, including the state labor commissioner.

The California strawberry industry is far from being a regressive industry unwilling to adopt new technologies, as the article implies. On the contrary. The strawberry industry is among the top agricultural industries in providing research grants to the University of California. From that research have come strawberry varieties now used throughout the world, water-conserving drip-irrigation systems (adopted by strawberry farmers in the 1970s), and the fundamental principles of today's widely touted integrated-pest-management strategies, first researched by the California strawberry industry in 1962.

Many farmers have survived and prospered by treating their workers well and producing a high-quality product that sometimes yields a higher price. These farmers value and respect the work ethic and highly value their employees. But farmers who complete the arduous and expensive task of complying with California's complex labor codes are at a serious disadvantage compared with those who do not. In fact, the only correct con-

clusion in the article was buried near the end, where Schlosser wrote, "Philip L. Martin . . . believes that the most effective way to improve the lives of farm workers is simply to enforce the existing labor and immigration laws."

On a level playing field the California strawberry industry can and does compete, with responsible farmers leading the way. In the long term good labor practices are more productive and profitable. Strict enforcement of existing laws ultimately creates the conditions necessary for such practices to prevail in the short term.

We do face competition from Mexico and Central America, where labor is cheaper and workers are abused, and those workers do find the fields of California infinitely more desirable. And, yes, that creates an inexorable flow of workers across the border. But that is not a fault of free markets, and it shows instead the inherent desirability of free markets and prosperity.

David R. Riggs
President

California Strawberry Commission
Watsonville, Calif.

Eric Schlosser replies:

The sharecropping section in my article was based on interviews with sharecroppers (including a number employed by Kirk Produce), officials at the California Labor Commission and the U.S. Department of Labor, prominent strawberry growers, faculty members at the University of California, lawyers affiliated with California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), and dozens of migrant workers. I did not interview the five sharecroppers whom Peter Gwosdof selected for me. Nor did I interview the three sharecroppers who are currently suing Kirk Produce, with the assistance of CRLA, alleging a variety of improper business practices. Instead I traveled through the countryside around Watsonville, Salinas, and Santa Maria, visiting sharecropped fields at random. Every sharecropper I met told me the same basic story, one that contradicts Mr. Gwosdof's account of how this system works.

While I was in California, I attempted to interview David Kirk, the founder of the company that bears his name. None of my phone calls was returned. Mr. Gwosdof seemed a competent spokesman for Kirk Produce. He drafted their contracts,

and for many years now he has defended them in court and otherwise represented their interests. The California Second District Court of Appeals has thoroughly rejected the arguments that Mr. Gwosdof makes here, ruling that Kirk Produce's sharecroppers are not "independent growers" but employees of the company—as are their migrants. On October 26 of last year the California Supreme Court upheld that decision, refusing to consider Kirk Produce's appeal.

David Riggs is correct in noting that California's strawberry industry has been at the forefront of technological innovation. Research, however, has principally been aimed at increasing the yield of strawberry plants. California's strawberry fields are now the most productive in the world. But high yields create the need for huge numbers of migrants at harvest. Until machines are invented that can pick strawberries without damaging the fruit or the plants, human hands will have to suffice. Very little research has been directed at making such work easier. Ronald Burk and Bob Espinola, the owners of Gold Coast Farms, in Santa Maria, provide weight-lifting belts to their strawberry pickers—a low-tech means of reducing the severe back pain caused by the job. Other growers might follow their example.

I did not assert, nor do I believe, that "all farmers are abusive and all workers are abused." On the contrary, I listed more than half a dozen companies (including the largest in the strawberry industry) that treat their workers well. Nowhere in his letter does Mr. Riggs mention the existence of sharecropping, a practice that now accounts for perhaps 40 percent of California's strawberry crop. Some sharecropping arrangements resemble employee profit-sharing plans; many others are tantamount to debt peonage. If the California Strawberry Commission truly wants to help growers who play by the rules, it should take a strong stand against the growers and commission merchants who benefit from exploiting their sharecroppers.

As for the free market, it should be noted that the state and federal governments have spent vast sums of money constructing the elaborate infrastructure that provides water to California's farmers. The irrigation system of the Central Valley is fed with water from more than 100 dams built with taxpayer's money,

the legacy of a public-works project that has spanned most of this century. Without these enormous subsidies California agriculture would not have bloomed. For a small fraction of that cost the farm workers now sleeping outdoors beneath plastic tarps could be provided with housing. I do not hold California growers responsible for the appalling living and working conditions endured by so many of their workers. The blame rests with a society that profits enormously from the labor of these migrants but remains unwilling to provide them with basic services, guarantee their legal rights, or even protect them from attacks by racists and demagogues. The current effort in Congress to eliminate California Rural Legal Assistance and similar organizations is just one more shameful episode in the history of this nation's farm workers.

Bow Ties

A few comments on John Spooner's article "Bow Ties" (November *Atlantic*).

I once met a fellow at Berghoff's Restaurant who was wearing a mink bow tie. He was a wrinkled, liver-spotted old raisin of a man with a buxom young wife, and damn if he didn't look *crème de la cool* in his brown glen-plaid suit, tan silk shirt, and little fur tie, even if he did wear the thickest glasses I have ever in my life seen. He said that his brother-in-law (his first wife's brother—he was a widower) ran a mink ranch and gave him the ties, so this was not the sort of thing in general circulation. He said his favorite tie was of red sable: *yum!*

If a man wearing a four-in-hand tie takes off his suit coat and rolls up his sleeves to do some hefting, he looks mighty foolish with his tie dangling flaccidly in front of him. A man wearing a bow tie with sleeves rolled up looks ready to work.

There used to be a custom tie shop on the second floor of a very old building on Michigan Avenue. In the late seventies, when *nobody* wore bow ties, I went there looking for a white bow tie. I wanted silk rep, not the white piqué that is worn with full dress. The fellow who ran the place said he had just the thing. He took me through a room of fabric cutters and seamstresses, into a musty storage room stacked to the ceiling with sturdy card-

board boxes. There he dug back through three layers of boxes to find a box labeled "Full-Dress/Rep." He opened the box and hesitated. I thought he would cry. Then he showed me—all the ties were yellowed with superannuation.

A fellow who lives down the street from me wears prissy little silk-print butterfly bow ties tied in a loose soft knot. He says that women always stop to straighten bow ties, and he likes the attention. I hope it helps.

In the days when he was still a leftist, Lyndon LaRouche wore snappy striped bow ties. After turning state capitalist, he took to wearing more "mainstream" ties that look suspiciously like polyester.

In days past repairmen and mechanics wore bow ties because they didn't get caught in the machinery. Nowadays repairmen wear odious clip-on four-in-hand ties, and mechanics go open-necked.

Henry Ford's chief goon, Harry Bennett, wore bow ties because you couldn't grab them in a fight.

I am a mechanic who still gets into tavern brawls now and again. I wear solid-colored, silk-rep, diamond- or blunt-edged bow ties knotted as tight and small as possible: real bad-ass ties.

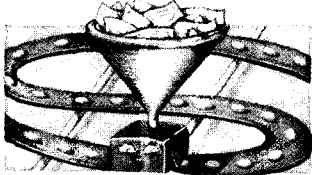
R. M. Schultz
Chicago, Ill.

John D. Spooner replies:

Everyone, it seems, *does* have an opinion about bow ties. A doctor called me to say that he is left-handed and for some reason has to lie down on the floor whenever he ties a bow. Another man, in the clothing business, called to tell me that whenever he goes to a party wearing a four-in-hand, he carries a folded bow in his pocket—"in case the crowd seems to need the bow-tie look."

I'm glad that people seem to be as passionate about bow ties as they are about the budget battle. Unlike R. M. Schultz, I have never seen anyone wearing a bow tie in a brawl. But I was dining in a restaurant a few weeks ago when a woman came up to my table, reached out, and pulled one end of my bow tie, undoing it. "I've always wanted to do that," she said. "Your article gave me the courage." She marched away. *I wonder what she meant by that?* I thought. But at least I didn't have to lie down on the floor to retie it. Years ago I practiced until I could tie a bow in the dark.

THE FEBRUARY ALMANAC



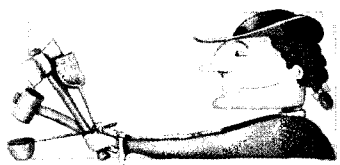
Government

Republican legislators may be enviously looking north this month, as Canada issues a \$2.00 coin and begins phasing out its \$2.00 bill: the Republicans' Contract With America calls for replacing the dollar bill with a coin, but efforts to this effect in Congress have failed. Estimates of savings to taxpayers from such a substitution—the life-span of a coin is 20 times that of a bill—range from \$100 million to \$400 million a year. Opponents include the Clinton Administration, which cites public sentiment (three quarters of those polled last year did not want the dollar bill eliminated, in part because coins are bulkier); the U.S. Mint (which has a stash of the unpopular Susan B. Anthony dollar coins, from 1979 and 1980, in its vaults); and the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, which object to the added strip-mining a dollar coin would require.

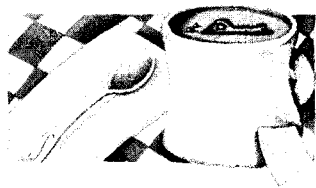
Q&A

Manhattan was supposedly sold for \$24 worth of trinkets. Where does that figure come from?

The figure is specious on several counts. The only authentic record of the sale appears in a 1626 letter by an official of the Dutch West India Company, who writes of a vessel recently returned from New Netherland with news that settlers there had made a trade: "they have bought the island Manhattes from the wild men for the value of sixty guilders. . . ."

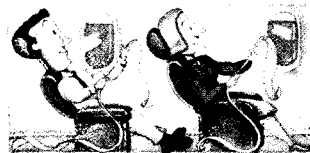


When the letter—itsself only a secondhand report—was translated into English in the 1870s, 60 guilders was converted to \$24 on the basis of nineteenth-century exchange rates, and this figure has never been adjusted for inflation. Even a corrected dollar amount would be largely meaningless, however, because the Dutch paid not in cash or even in trinkets but in manufactured metal goods such as knives and ax heads—implements that were of little worth to the Dutch but of immeasurable value to Native Americans who were lacking the technology to produce such tools themselves.



Environment

This month Florida decides whether to try to buy a 32,000-acre sugar plantation between Lake Okeechobee and Everglades National Park. If the sale is concluded, the land will be converted to marsh, thus bolstering the area's natural water-storage and filtration capacity—a key to preserving the fragile ecosystem of the Everglades. In addition, the decline in sugar production will reduce the flow of pollutants into the park. The purchase is a major goal of Florida's Everglades Forever restoration project; the federal government may also get involved, by taxing sugar production nationwide to help fund the purchase. Predictably, the sugar industry—which benefits from a controversial price-support program and is widely blamed for much of the degradation of the Everglades—opposes the sale and the tax proposal, citing a potential loss of jobs on the plantation and the need to compete with heavily subsidized foreign sugar companies.



Health & Safety

Nervous flyers can perhaps take heart this month, as the Federal Aviation Administration inaugurates a national electronic database for monitoring air-transportation safety. The Safety Performance Analysis System (SPAS) will help FAA inspectors quickly detect problems in particular aircraft and airlines as well as industry-wide. SPAS can compare a given craft's performance with that of similar-sized planes. It can also examine repair stations, training programs, and personnel in all organizations under FAA surveillance. The system was designed in collaboration with the Department of Defense, which hopes to use it to evaluate its own planes. Also this month, a national toll-free 24-hour hot line to counsel victims of domestic violence is scheduled to begin operation in Austin, Texas. The hot line is funded by a \$1 million federal grant authorized by the 1994 crime bill.

Arts & Letters

Some of the nation's museums will get a boost this month, as the Knight Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts award the first grants from their jointly run national Museum Loan Network, designed to facilitate the sharing of museum collections. Some 15 to 20 grants, ranging from \$5,000 to \$30,000, will be given this year to help institutions pay for various aspects of the borrowing and lending process. The network is also planning to establish a database



that will provide all museums with information about objects available for loan. The escalating costs of mounting exhibits have kept an increasing number of objects from public view, a situation that the network is hoping to help remedy: one prominent curator estimates that up to 90 percent of the country's museum holdings currently languish in storage.

The Skies

February 2, Venus, which is brilliant in the southwestern sky just after sunset for much of the month, tonight is joined by Saturn. 4, Full Moon, also known this month as the Hunger, Trapper's, and Frightened Coyote Moon. 21, Venus lies just above the upper horn of the crescent Moon just after sunset. 29, Leap Day.



75 Years Ago

Agnes Repplier, writing in the February, 1921, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "There are, indeed, devout Christian communities which expend their time, money, and energy in extinguishing in the breasts of other Christians the faith which has sufficed and supported them. The methods of these propagandists are more genial than were those of the Inquisition; but their temerity is no less, and their animating principle is the same. They proffer their competing set of dogmas with absolute assurance, forgetting that man does not live by fractions of theology, but by the correspondence of his nature with spiritual influences moulded through the centuries to meet his needs. To counsel the doubtful is a Christian duty; but to create the doubts we counsel is nowhere recommended. It savors too closely of omniscience."

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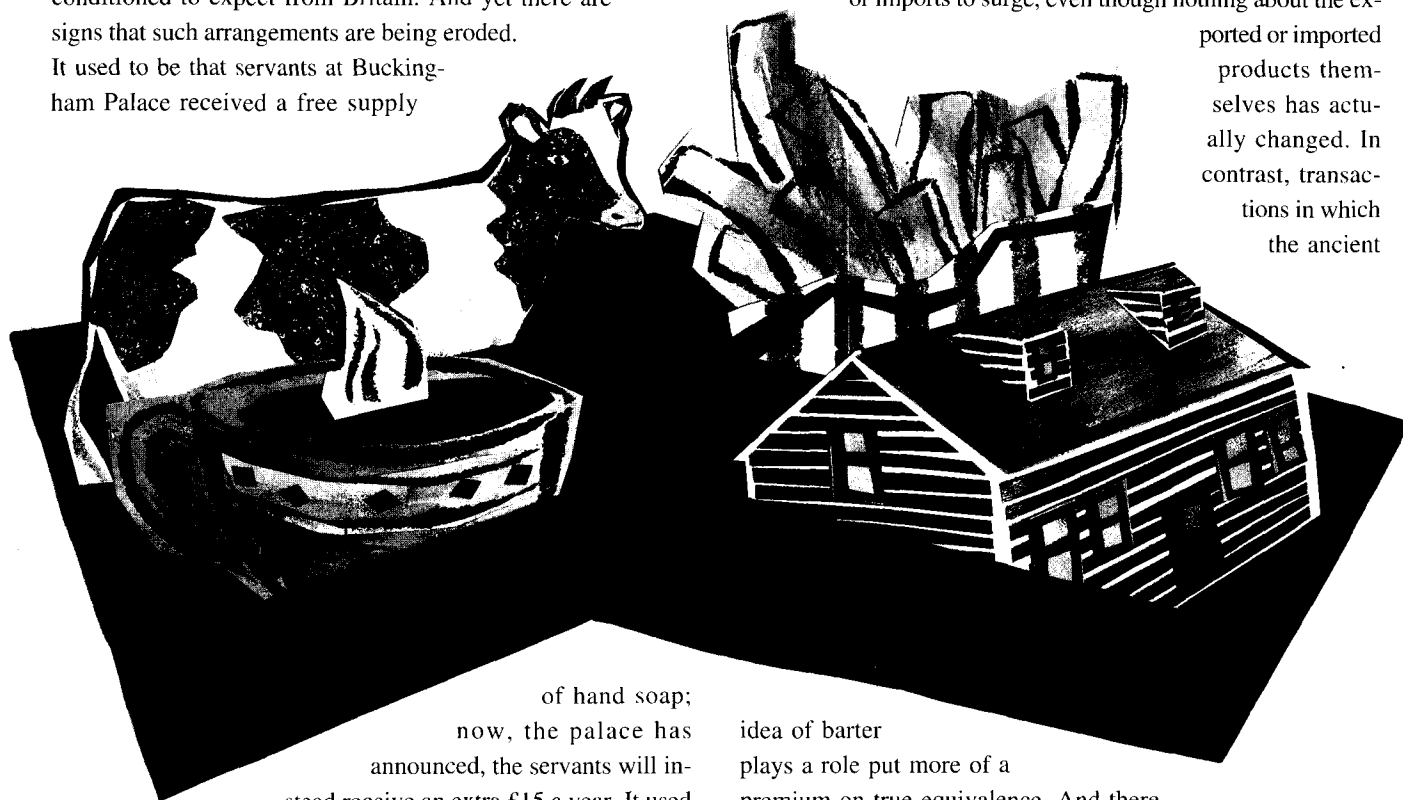
Fair Trade

A monetary system for our uncertain times

BY tradition the poet laureate of Great Britain annually receives not only a stipend of £70 but also the value of a tierce (forty-two U.S. gallons) of wine, paid in cash at seventeenth-century prices, and, famously, a butt of sack (that is, 130 gallons of it). This is the sort of arrangement—by turns quaint, feudalistic, and humane—that we have for centuries been conditioned to expect from Britain. And yet there are signs that such arrangements are being eroded. It used to be that servants at Buckingham Palace received a free supply

Such exchanges are the economic version of the judicial sentencing that consigns criminals to grimly appropriate activities (crooked slumlord must live in his own building; crooked speculator must teach high school economics) rather than to time in jail. Money can be delusory. It is a commonplace that the value of one currency relative to another can cause a country's exports or imports to surge, even though nothing about the ex-

ported or imported products themselves has actually changed. In contrast, transactions in which the ancient



of hand soap; now, the palace has announced, the servants will instead receive an extra £15 a year. It used to be that those who served at royal social functions were allowed to take home two miniature bottles of liquor on each occasion; now they will instead receive an extra £45 a year. Even the poet laureate, Ted Hughes, seems to have his eye on the cash. Last year, according to a newspaper report, he made known his intention to sell his butt of sack at £4 the bottle, the vintage to be marketed under the name Laureate's Choice. Wisely, I think, Hughes seems not to have followed through on this scheme.

There is something fundamentally honest and compelling about economic exchanges "in kind," in which the value of goods or services is calibrated at least in part in terms other than monetary.

idea of barter plays a role put more of a premium on true equivalence. And there are many indications that, despite what may be happening to feudal vestiges in Britain, the world economic system is finding barter to be congenial in more and more instances—for governments, for corporations, and for individuals. By one estimate, some 20 percent of the world's economic transactions are now in the form of barter deals, up from only about five percent thirty years ago.

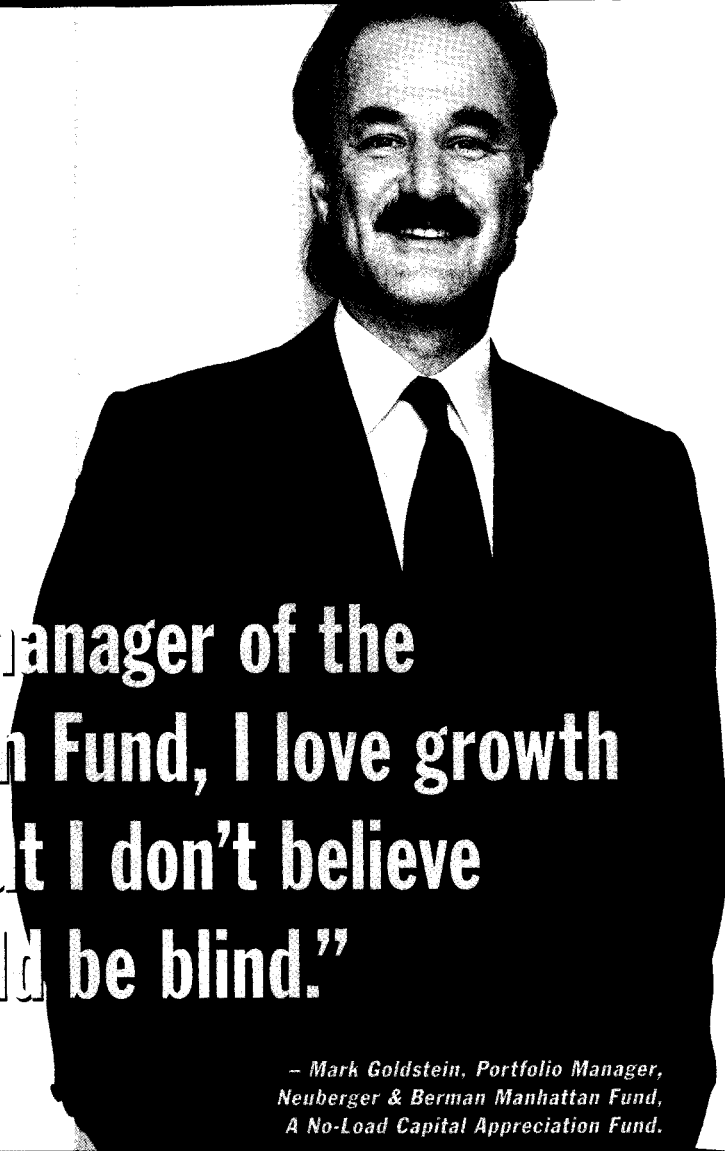
In the American domestic economy the value of barter deals is growing by about 15 percent a year.

One of the biggest barter transactions in history took place in 1990 between PepsiCo and Russia: a \$3 billion exchange of cola syrup for Stolichnaya vodka. To assist hurricane victims in

by Cullen Murphy

Illustration by Tina Vey

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Florida and Hawaii, a broker several years ago arranged for the exchange of 500 Fujitsu laser printers for 1.7 million “meals ready-to-eat” left over from the Gulf War. The government of Peru is settling some of its debt to overseas creditors with iron pellets, fish meal, copper wire, and alpaca cloth. The slow thaw in relations between North and South Korea has been helped along by a barter arrangement involving flour and zinc. There now seems to be a potential barter aspect to almost everything. A 1991 survey by an organ-donation network sampled opinion on whether organ providers or their families might barter body parts for funeral services, or whether people who agreed to become organ donors might be given preferential placement on waiting lists in the event that they themselves needed a replacement. In Israel last year the country’s gravediggers sought a labor agreement stipulating that workers receive two grave sites for every five years of service.

Barter is, of course, deeply primitive, which may account for a measure of its enduring appeal. But these days something else is also at work. In his illuminating new book *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) the philosopher John R. Searle draws a distinction between “brute” facts, which are facts that are simply facts (such as that Mount Everest exists, or that the sun is 93 million miles from Earth), and “institutional” facts, which are facts only as long as we all concede that they are facts (such as that marriage is real, or that there is something called private property and something called human rights, or that a person is a citizen of a particular country). Barter is a product of a brute-fact world: I have wheat, you have cows—let’s trade. Barter’s lineal descendant, money, inhabits the realm of institutional fact: it has value only because we agree that it does. Institutional fact, Searle points out, is the glory of our species, the very basis of cultural progress. Of course, institutional fact is also inherently fragile—the first thing to go as a society becomes less stable. Searle observes sourly, “One of the most fascinating—and terrifying—features of the era in which I write this is the steady erosion of acceptance of large institutional structures around the world.”

It is when institutional fact seems to be coming unraveled that brute fact reasserts its importance. Imagine a world in which new countries with laughable currencies materialize almost monthly; in which ruinous inflation here and there radically warps individual and mass behavior; in which companies and citizens alike accrue benefit from economic activity that occurs in the shadows—imagine such a world and it is not hard to understand the resurgence of barter.

■ ■ ■

In between barter and what we now think of as money there used to be a step in which bits of paper were actually promissory notes (“Pay the bearer . . .”) that could in theory be redeemed for some valuable commodity, such as gold or silver. These notes fell into the category known as contract money. The United States abandoned contract money when it went completely off the gold standard, in 1971, and I recall a slight sensation at the time of having slipped a mooring. Indeed, I still miss the as-

surance that our currency is supported by something other than the full faith and credit of the United States of America.

One wonders: Would it not be a confidence-building gesture in this uncertain age if major world currencies were once again pegged to commodities of relatively stable worth, thereby re-endowing money with some of barter’s simple ballast? For the United States an obvious opportunity presents itself early this year, when the most significant overhaul of U.S. currency in six decades is scheduled to begin. The overhaul, prompted by the need for new designs that can foil counterfeiters, is to begin with the \$100 bill, followed at half-yearly to yearly intervals by the other bills in descending order of value.

I would propose that, coincident with the new design, the U.S. Treasury peg the new \$100 bill to the value of a commodity whose worth in the national affection gives promise of constancy—for instance, a pair of Nike Air Jordan athletic shoes. Henceforward, no matter what happened to the value of America’s money, that \$100 bill—a “Jordan” or “J-note,” as we’d no doubt eventually come to call it—would always be good for a pair of Nikes. Walk into a store with a J-note in A.D. 2005 or 2025 and you’ll walk out with the shoes. On the redesigned bank note itself, to drive the point home, athletic shoes would replace the traditional arrows and olive branch in the American eagle’s claws.

Along similar principles, the new \$50 bill, which will probably be introduced later this year, could be pegged forever to the value of four seats in a major-league ballpark (and an engraving of Doubleday Field, in Cooperstown, could grace the reverse side). The \$20 bill could be redeemed for a tankful of gas for an American-made compact car. The \$10 bill would be exchangeable for Big Macs and small drinks for a family of four. The \$5.00 bill would always be good for a paperback edition of any nineteenth-century novel. The \$1.00 bill would allow you to talk to your mother on the phone from anywhere in the world for one minute. If that is impracticable, then it should at least always get you a decent cup of coffee. Although there are no immediate plans to redesign the \$500, \$1,000, \$5,000, \$10,000, and \$100,000 bills, I am certain that imaginative equivalences can be found for them as well. I would be grateful, for instance, if the value of the last of these denominations could be locked in as the equivalent of the cost of four years of education at a private college or university. The image of Woodrow Wilson on the \$100,000 bill might be replaced by that of John Harvard or Lord Jeffrey Amherst.

No monetary system is perfect, and this one will reveal flaws as time goes on. Inflation will still be possible, though it will take a more visible and immediately annoying form (for instance, the form of shrinking Big Macs, gas tanks, and semesters) than it often does at present. But in a world where money’s value can change by the nanosecond and its physical reality can be no more substantial than an electronic impulse, some compensating loss of abstraction would surely be welcome. And for \$6.00, a cup of coffee and *Treasure Island* will always be a good deal. ☞

Dance and Theater

BY AUSTIN BAER AND NANCY DALVA

LESS IS MORE IN THE EYES OF A CELEBRATED CHOREOGRAPHER

February finds the Merce Cunningham Dance Company presenting *Events* at The Joyce Theater, in New York City (February 6–11; for ticket information call 212-242-0800). The format of the evenings is unique to the venerable choreographer and his company, who since the first *Event* (some thirty years ago, at a museum in Vienna) have performed hundreds of them all around the world, outdoors and indoors.

Originally devised for unconventional spaces, in recent years *Events* have been presented, to great advantage, in proscenium theaters. As Cunningham himself explains, "The *Events* are a collage . . . made up of elements from the repertory and from new material. Each *Event* is arranged specifically for the space it will occupy, and is presented without intermission. There is the possibility of several separate and independent activities happening at the same time. Each *Event* is unique, to allow for not so much an evening of dances as the experience of dance."

Like all of Cunningham's work, *Events*

are conceived and rehearsed without the music that is heard during their performance, and without reference to their eventual costumes and scenery. But here the dances are stripped even of their own context, with the beginning of one dance succeeded, perhaps, by the end of another, followed by the middle of something else.

This is paradigmatic Cunningham: dance for its own sake, liberated from its conventional trappings. And this is the Cunningham paradox: however much he takes away, Merce is left, invariably, with more. A *Joyce Event* is ninety minutes of brief trysts, random frolics, passing perplexity, and sudden, inexplicable rapture; it contains possibilities for contemplation, meditation, epiphany, and exhilaration.

Inherently theatrical, innately musical, subliminally allusive—Cunningham can dispense with story, score, and decor

because in his hands dance already has them. He is our most innovative choreographer, and our least faddish. If George Balanchine's dances are music made visible, Merce Cunningham's dances are the visible made musical.

For some fifty years—in harmony with the natural world and, of late, in collusion with technology, for he is enamored of a program that allows him to choreograph on a computer—Cunningham has kept dance apace with the art, the literature, and the science of the twentieth century. To miss seeing his marvelous company is to miss one of the great events of our time. —N.D.

SINS OF THE FATHER

"We sail with a corpse in the cargo," Ibsen once wrote. In none of his plays is the dead weight of the past more palpable than in *Ghosts*. Spotless young Osvald Alving comes home on the brink of dementia, rotten with syphilis inherited from his whoring father. It is easy to blame Osvald's plight solely on Dad (for one thing, the man is dead). But society at large bears a share of the responsibility, for the poison of its false pieties, its preoccupation with appearances, its soul-crushing mediocrity. So does (mostly blameless) Mom, as Ibsen pitilessly forces her to realize, for knuckling under to bourgeois respectabilities. In the end the best she can do by her child is to promise to administer, when the time comes, his precious cache of fatal morphine tablets. Will she have the heart? Ibsen leaves us very much in doubt. The director Madeleine Pabis, at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, offers a fresh look at *Ghosts* (February 20–March 17; 513-421-3888); at Hartford Stage, Mark Lamos, who can strike the tragic chord without resorting to shopworn histrionics, offers another (March 23–April 27; 203-527-5151).

—A.B.

THE RAKE'S PROGRESS

In death, John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester (1647–1680), leads a double life. Historians of the Restoration know him as the squalid epitome of the Restoration rake, a lad of golden promise who desperately quipped, drank, and fornicated his way into an early grave, leaving behind a legacy of witty, often scabrous verse. But then he also survives, prettied up, as Dorimant, the brilliant machinator of *The Man of Mode*, a comedy by his friend and fellow wit George Etherege. The new play *The Libertine*, by Stephen Jeffreys, brings Rochester back to the stage again, warts and all, corrupting youth, abusing his wife, alienating his mis-

tress, dissing the King. The (true) spectacle of self-waste is devastating. "I know he is a Devil," Etherege said of Rochester, "but he has something of the Angel yet undefac'd in him." In the American premiere of *The Libertine*, by Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Rochester is played by John Malkovich, an actor unsurpassed at intellectual bullying and erotic menace. A glimpse of the unfallen angel may not be too much to hope for—Malkovich has his silky side. (February 14–April 7; 312-335-1650.) —A.B.

Austin Baer is a writer based in New York.
Nancy Dalva is a contributor to *Dance Ink* and other publications.



John Malkovich (above)
and John Wilmot (below)



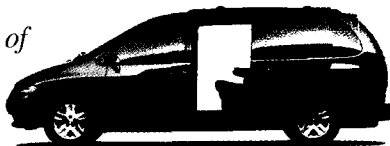
Haunted son

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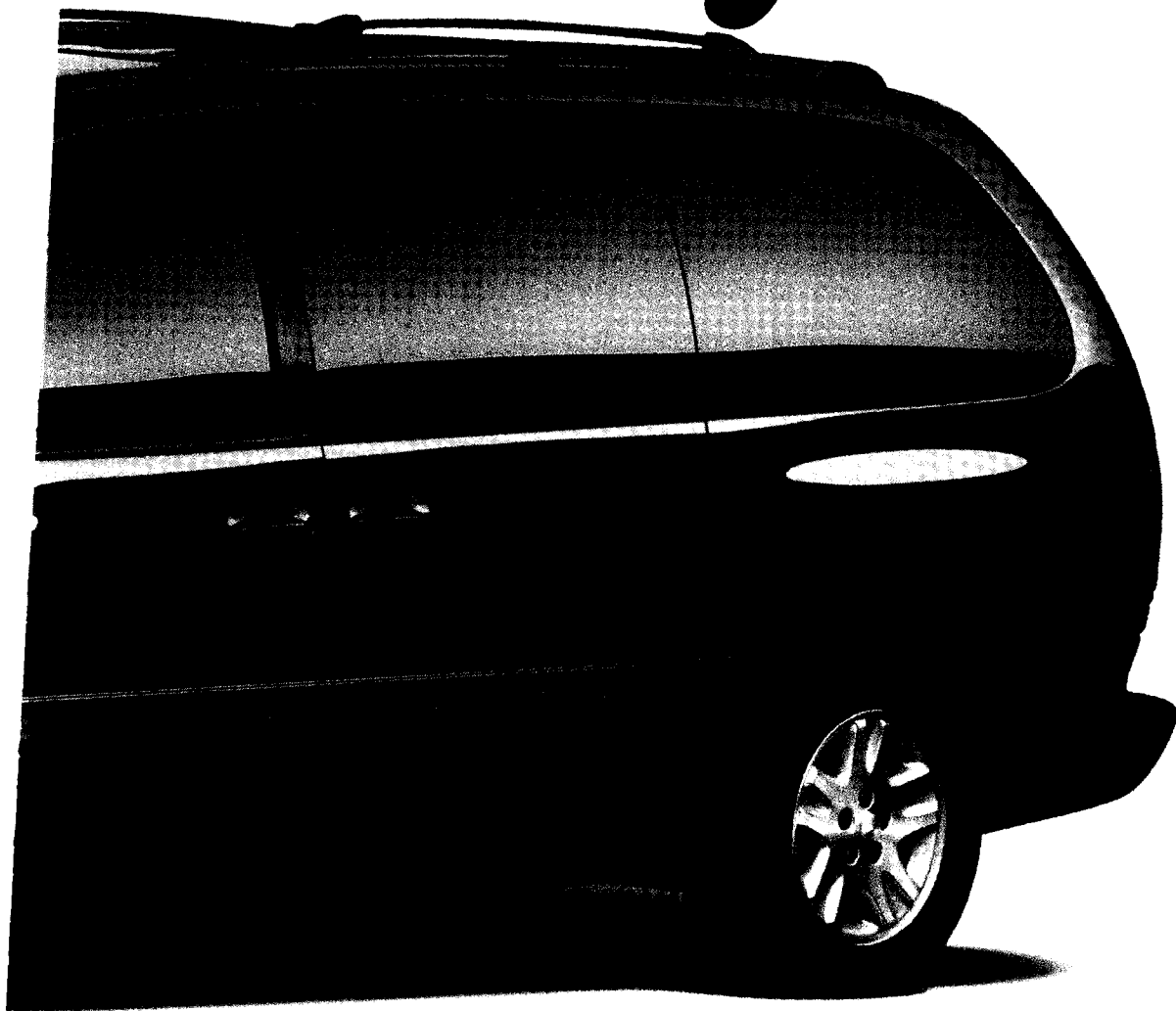


that hold everything from a Big Gulp® to your favorite cup from home. Might have been the quiet. Or the ride. The handling. Safety features like standard driver and

front passenger airbags. Or the magic way the new Caravan can turn in a smaller circle even though it's longer. Then again, perhaps it was all those nooks and



f the year.



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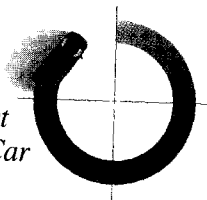
crannies for everything from the kids' toys to umbrellas. Or maybe it was simply all that room and comfort for people, and all that versatile, flexible space for cargo.

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Film

BY ELLA TAYLOR



Macy trying to hide the evidence

HOME SWEET HOME

The Coen brothers, Joel and Ethan, are not an acquired taste. You either like them or you don't, because however much their subject matter varies, from *Blood Simple* (1985) to the disastrous *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994), the song remains the same—a rancid, brutally comic affront to good taste and good will. It's a chilly life with the Coens, and nowhere more so than in their latest film, which is also their funniest and cruelest in years. *Fargo* takes an ice pick to the Coens' home state of Minnesota, turning a fact-

based story into a black comedy that pokes fun simultaneously at the heartland and at the conventions of the true-crime genre. (Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* seems a prime target.) William H. Macy stars as a grubby Twin Cities car dealer whose latest ham-fisted attempt at

The Coens

making a fast buck is to hire a couple of hit men (Steve Buscemi, wearing frightening teeth, and Peter Stormare) from Fargo, North Dakota, to kidnap his wife and then extort a ransom from her father. When everything goes wrong and several locals die in the hick town of Brainerd, the phlegmatic and highly pregnant sheriff (Frances McDormand, in a hilariously laconic performance) is brought in to investigate. *Fargo* is the deadpan gorefest we have come to expect from the Coens, but the movie's rather overworked joke is midwestern blandness. By the end of the movie you'd rather see any number of severed limbs than endure another "ya betcha" or "okey, dokey, thanks a bunch." How will it play in Peoria? Probably not at all.

Ella Taylor is a film critic for LA Weekly.

A LITTLE GIRL'S BIG ADVENTURE

Iranian director Jafar Panahi's first feature, *The White Balloon*, which won the Camera d'Or and co-won the International Critics' Prize at Cannes last year, tells of an awfully big adventure in an awfully small world. In the hours before Tehran's New Year, a seven-year-old girl named Razieh (played with astonishing poise by Aida Mohammakhani) sets out to buy a goldfish for the festivities, armed with her mother's housekeeping money and dire warnings not to dally. Adult advice is made to be ignored: losing her precious stash, first to a wily snake-charmer, then to a gutter near a tailor's shop, Razieh encounters indifference, cantankerousness, and the kindness of strangers—a whole world contained within a few streets. Scripted by veteran director Abbas Kiarostami (who direct-

ed the exquisite 1994 film *Through the Olive Trees*) and shot in real time from the perspective of the fiercely single-minded child, *The White Balloon* is not a film for the plot-hungry. This beautiful movie is a funny, touching, and intelligent celebration of the process of looking and the assertion of an adventurous spirit over prudence.



A very important goldfish

A LOVE TRIANGLE FOR THE NINETIES

Nothing can be finer than a French sex farce when it's done right. Actress Josiane Balasko (*Grosse Fatigue*) makes a perky contribution to the tradition with *French Twist*, a très nineties romp, set in a French provincial town, about a reluctant ménage à trois with increasingly fluid sexual preferences. Loli (Victoria Abril) is a dancer who gave up her career to raise a family with her husband, Laurent (Alain Chabat), a self-satisfied realtor who has kept his many infidelities from his trusting wife. Their marriage is an appletart waiting to be upset. Enter, right on cue, Marijo (Balasko), a cheerful butch-lesbian disc jockey who charms

Marijo, sharing her favors with both and enjoying their jealousy, until she is in turn outmaneuvered by a shift in the balance of power. As broad as it is slight and unstinting with the slapstick, *French Twist* races from one wave of mayhem to the next. The movie is saved from its occasional dips into gooey sentimentalism by peppy dialogue, written by Balasko, and by the sprightly ensemble acting, lifted into greatness by the incomparably radiant Abril, the Spanish diva of many a Pedro Almodovar film.

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ANSWERS TO THE JANUARY CHALLENGE:

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Balasko, Abril, and Chabat (left to right)

her way into Loli's bed and enrages the homophobic Laurent. When Laurent's dim-bulb friend (Ticky Holgado) spills the beans to Loli about her husband's philandering, she seizes the advantage and queens it over both Laurent and

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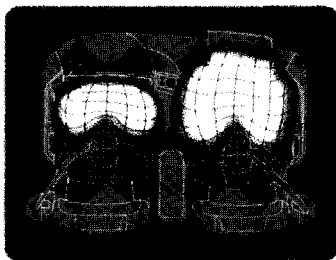
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(Continued from page 20)

elude someone like George Wallace, not to mention immunity from the negative coverage he might attract for some of his more inflammatory statements.

Certainly Buchanan has written and said some things that if uttered by Alexander, Dole, or Clinton would be considered political suicide. At one point Buchanan seemed to blame only Jewish commentators (Abe Rosenthal, Charles Krauthammer, Richard Perle, and Henry Kissinger) for helping to precipitate the Gulf War—one of several observations that led his fellow conservative William F. Buckley to conclude in a celebrated 1991 essay in the *National Review* that Buchanan may well have occasionally crossed the line into anti-Semitism. Yet Buchanan's attacks are only part of a much greater belligerence he has always displayed toward his enemies; this is a pundit who wears his insensitivities on his sleeve. Buchanan vehemently opposed the establishment of a national holiday for Martin Luther King Jr., once described Adolf Hitler as "an individual of great courage... extraordinary gifts," called the old apartheid regime in South Africa "an outpost of Western empire and Western civilization," and described AIDS as the "retribution" of nature against those "who have declared war" upon it.

It may be that Buchanan has been saying such things for so long that his Washington media friends no longer hear them, or that the "private sweetness" described by those who know him overcomes his public belligerence in their eyes. What is apparent, however, is that Buchanan's stridency doesn't sit well when he moves beyond his populist cadre or inside-the-Beltway talk shows to speak to a broader national audience. When he addressed such an audience—in prime time, at the 1992 Republican National Convention—he used the occasion to describe Hillary Clinton as a radical feminist who had no place in "God's country," called Al Gore an "environmental extremist" who would put "insects, rats, and birds ahead of families, workers, and jobs," and explained how the military might be forced to liberate urban America, block by block. The speech is widely regarded as having launched a tremendous backlash against the convention which discredited the Republican Party and helped to elect Clinton.

ANOTHER novel aspect of Buchanan's candidacy is its religious dimension. The rural populists of a century ago had something of an anti-Catholic animus, fueled by their belief that recent Catholic immigrants were responsible for the machine politics of the urban North. More important, no serious Republican presidential contender has ever been Catholic. (Alexander Haig, who is Catholic, did seek the party's nomination, in 1988.) Virtually everyone who writes about Buchanan, including himself, talks about his strong roots in the deeply religious and traditional Catholic enclaves of midcentury Washington, D.C.: he comes from a family of eleven, was raised in Blessed Sacrament parish, attended Gonzaga High School, run by Jesuits, and Georgetown University, as a day student. It was in this close-knit community that Buchanan was "born and bred a brawler," as one writer put it, and came to see himself, and others like him, as perpetual outsiders in the then largely WASP world of elite Washington. Thus the identification with fellow Catholic Joseph McCarthy, who was admired, Buchanan once wrote, "because for four years he was daily kicking the living hell out of people most Americans concluded ought to have the living hell kicked out of them."

A generation ago that strong cultural and religious identification would have made it impossible for Buchanan to prosper in the Republican Party. Urban Catholics had always been a key part of the old Democratic coalition—a trend that peaked in 1960. Though Buchanan supported Nixon over John F. Kennedy, Catholics gave the Democrat 78 percent of their votes—the highest proportion ever. Yet since that election Catholics have been slowly drifting away from the Democratic Party, disinclined to support its cultural liberalism. Whereas the meaningful religious dividing line in American politics was until recently between Catholic Democrats and Protestant Republicans, today it is between those who are deeply religious (and tend to be Republican) and those who are not. That shift has allowed Buchanan to try to lay claim to the leadership of a fundamentalist, essentially Protestant movement in politics that several decades earlier would have opposed him because of his religion.

Yet for all the focus in the media on Buchanan—he even made the cover of

Time in November—he remains a very long way from the nomination and still faces enormous hurdles. It has been the dream of populists for a century that the various elements of "the disenfranchised" could somehow be persuaded to see beyond their own narrow societal interests and join with others similarly situated. Yet putting together a coalition of economic, social-issue, and disaffected western populists would seem to be terribly difficult in our atomized culture. Perot, for example, attracts economic populists with his anti-free-trade and anti-immigration views, but his appeal is to secular voters; he made a somewhat poor showing among fundamentalists in 1992. Conversely, Pat Robertson might attract some of those fundamentalist voters—as he did in 1988, when he finished a surprise second in the Iowa caucuses, ahead of George Bush—but his appeal to other groups is limited. How Buchanan could appeal to each of these factions, much less merge them, is hard to imagine.

More important, most of Buchanan's potential voters are not traditional Republicans; many, in fact, pride themselves on their independent status. "Buchanan has a vote," says the Republican pollster Ed Goeas. "The question is whether it's a Republican vote." Although Democratic primaries often attract disaffected voters who support a protest candidate, Republican primaries have never yet done so. This is the party, after all, that since 1948 has always nominated someone running at or near the top of national polls a year before the election. The Republican Party may be changing demographically, but it still tends to be dominated in the primaries by its traditional Main Street, suburban-country-

*Buchanan's potential
voters are not
traditional Republicans;
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pendent status.*

club constituency, which has been staunchly internationalist and free-trade for the past half century. Even the new wave of Gingrich-inspired Republican freshmen march far more to this tune than to anything sung by Buchanan. To win primaries, Buchanan will have to persuade many of his potential supporters to register as Republicans for the first time, or at least to vote in a Republican primary open to independents. It is impossible to find a reputable political analyst who thinks that Buchanan could actually pull off this hostile takeover of the Republican Party.

That's why some of his admirers, among them Howard Phillips, the conservative chairman of the U.S. Taxpayers Alliance, say that Buchanan can maximize his impact only by running as an independent candidate in the general election. They argue, somewhat persuasively, that "outsiders" rarely fare well in political parties, which are, after all, establishment institutions. Self-styled populists have made the strongest impact on our politics by running for President as independents and then enjoying the winner's courtship of their constituencies—Nixon of Wallace supporters, Republicans and Democrats of the Perot vote. The analyst Kevin Phillips estimates that if Buchanan were to run against a moderate Republican as an independent in 1996 (and assuming Perot does not), he might draw somewhere between six and twelve percent—quite a respectable showing by historical standards.

Unlike many of his populist predecessors, however, Buchanan so far has seemed strongly disinclined to bolt his party and go it alone. He has always had a fierce sense of loyalty, but it goes beyond even that. His 1988 autobiography, *Right From the Beginning*, is a revealing 300-plus-page recital of a lifetime of fights: Buchanan recounts with joy every childhood acquaintance he decked (there were quite a few) and every brawl he joined. In fact, what's remarkable about Buchanan's autobiography is that although most books about politicians make short work of childhood to get to the politics, Buchanan's book has a terrible time leaving home. All candidates seem to have an emblematic story that they like to tell or that gets told by others: Dole's is about his war wound; Clinton's is about standing up as a teenager to his

abusive stepfather. Buchanan's seems to be about, of all things, the time he as a college student got into a fight with some policemen. He was expelled from Georgetown because of the incident, but through his father's intercession he was allowed to return the following year.

All the fights in Buchanan's book have this vaguely adolescent quality: Pat brawls; Pat gets into trouble; Pat gets bailed out in the end by Dad or his surrogate, because he really didn't mean it. His supposed beligerence notwithstanding, the policemen story is the exception that proves the rule: Buchanan seems to duck meaningful confrontations—or at least confrontations that might have consequences. He professes a love of fighting but he never served in the military. Peggy Noonan, in her book *What I Saw at the Revolution*, relates that she was struck by how sweet and uncombative Buchanan was amid all the infighting he encountered in his role as communications director for Reagan. "Pat spent half his time in the [Reagan] White House trying to dodge fights, which wasn't easy," she wrote. If Buchanan is "the pit bull of the American right," as George Will has described him, he has a peculiar ability to avoid biting grown-ups—except those policemen.

There is nothing wrong, of course, with choosing your fights, though doing so is a bit odd for a figure who makes truculence his calling card. But it does tell us why the Buchanan campaign may in the end not change American politics or the Republican Party nearly as much as it has the potential to do. Because populism is an anti-establishment movement that whips up passions, it can be dangerous to its practitioners: a true populist has to alienate powerful people at the top, which is one reason why so many populist leaders have ended up in disgrace. Pat Buchanan has shown himself to be a man who likes to go back to his comfortable suburban-Washington home at the end of the day to write his columns, read poetry, and hobnob with his friends in the establishment worlds of politics and the media. There's nothing wrong with loving friends and home so much you can never leave them. But if your home is the corridor of power known as Washington, D.C., the current focus of populist resentment in America, it's hard to do that and also become the tribune of the disenfranchised and the angry. ☪



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An Encore for Chaos?

The embattled despot Daniel arap Moi, of Kenya, has sought to preserve his regime by exploiting ethnic divisions. So why is Kenya still intact?

BY the benighted standards of East Africa the spectacle in this crowded, squalid refugee camp is all too grimly familiar: tents and shacks, children in rags, adults hanging their heads in endless solemn discussion. The talk is of ethnic cleansing, private militias, the prospect of war. "We don't want any revenge," one of them is saying. "We are not harboring any hatred. But as a human being, if you are pushed to the wall, you can be provoked." The scene could be anywhere in a vast arc of despair that has blighted this part of the world for a generation: Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. But it takes place in none of those

by **Bill Berkeley**

exhausted battlegrounds. This is Kenya. East Africa's richest country by far, familiar to safari lovers and Isak Dinesen readers, Kenya is supposed to be an exception to the regional rule of interminable wars and economic ruin. Its game parks lure nearly a million tourists each year. Telephones work, electricity flows, children go to school in shorts and knee socks. Kenya has long been a haven for other countries' refugees. The sight of Kenyan refugees is cause for alarm.

It is a brilliant Saturday morning in the lush green hills of the Rift Valley, Kenya's most fertile farming region. In the days of British colonial rule these hills were called the White Highlands, and formed a gor-

geous and exotic backdrop for the khaki-clad protagonists of Dinesen, Elspeth Huxley, and Beryl Markham. But the story unfolding today is of a different kind.

"Twelve members of my family were displaced," a man I'll call James tells me. He is forty-four years old, a bewildered-looking man with tired eyes and a beard of white stubble. The interview is conducted furtively in a shack—a friend minds the door, wary of informers. This is an officially declared "security zone," barred to journalists.

James says that a band of perhaps 200 arsonists attacked his farm, wielding bows and arrows. They looted and torched his house, and drove its panicked occupants into the bush. "We don't return home because we fear we will be beaten again," he explains. "The attackers are still there." He adds, "They were organized." By whom? "We don't want to say, really."

What James won't say is by now well documented: the mob that attacked his home was organized by agents of the Kenyan government. James is Kikuyu—a member of one of Kenya's largest ethnic groups. The attackers were Kalenjin—members of the small pastoral group

A Kikuyu victim of ethnic clashes amid the wreckage of her home

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to which Kenya's longtime President, Daniel arap Moi, belongs. Since 1991 more than 1,500 Kenyans have been killed—mostly Kikuyus like James, but also Luos and Luhyas—and 300,000 have been displaced in ethnic clashes, mostly with Kalenjin, that have shaken Kenya's precarious unity.

President Moi and members of his ruling clique have sought to deflect responsibility for the violence by blaming age-old hatreds—stirred up, they claim, by the advent of multi-party democracy. But the evidence of state complicity is strong, and it fits a pattern that has become striking in post-Cold War Africa. Daniel arap Moi,

The Kenyan papers are filled with hair-raising tales of gangsterism.

While I was there, the Nairobi police shot dead twenty criminal suspects in just ten days.

who is seventy-one years old and widely loathed, presided for years over a predatory single-party regime that was made possible by the patronage of the West. No longer a Cold War asset, and pressured to democratize, Moi has clung to power by playing dirty. Skillfully manipulating the levers of coercion and bribery, he has sabotaged Kenya's monetary system, emasculated the rule of law, and stoked the destructive fires of ethnicity.

Is Kenya to become yet another African nightmare? Many fear so. The miracle is that it has not already done so. For years Kenya has been viewed as the proverbial powder keg. There were epochal assassinations in the 1960s and 1970s. A failed coup in 1982 exposed sharp divisions of group and class. Now the clashes have inflamed those divisions. Yet somehow Kenya confounds perennial predictions of an imminent inferno. Though tensions remain high, thousands remain homeless, and almost no one has been held accountable, the Rift Valley clashes appear to

have subsided for now; the lust for revenge has been held in check. Kenyans who look at their broken neighbors and ask, "Could it happen here?" now also ask, "Why *hasn't* it happened here?"

I lived in Kenya for eight months recently, and traveled to all its battered neighbors in turn. I came to appreciate why Kenya is not just another African horror story: it has strengths that its neighbors never had. The country is both tearing itself apart and struggling mightily to hold itself together. Kenya is an all too typical study in the use of ethnicity as an instrument of tyranny. But it may also demonstrate the limits of ethnicity in the face of countervailing forces. The country is in the midst of a powerful emancipation drama. The United States was once a key player in that drama. No longer. Having spurred the movement toward multi-party democracy, it has, as one Kenyan says, gone "under the carpet."

"IT is a miracle that we have come this far without disintegrating," says Gitobu Imanyara, a lawyer in Nairobi who has been at the forefront of Kenya's fitful years-long struggle to break free of corrupt and oppressive single-party rule. Like many others, Imanyara has paid a price. The magazine he published, the *Nairobi Law Monthly*, was repeatedly raided and ransacked, and harassed out of business for a time. Imanyara has been detained four times, including once for two months in a psychiatric ward after he accused President Moi of filling government jobs according to ethnic affiliation rather than competence.

"We have a President who is determined to fulfill his prophesy that the country is not cohesive enough for multi-party democracy," Imanyara says. "His desire is to prove he was right, even if it means destroying Kenya as a country." Kenya includes more than forty ethnic groups, Imanyara explains. "The President has consistently pursued policies that encourage the various ethnic groups to think of themselves as different, not as one nation."

Imanyara's office overlooks Moi Avenue, the bustling main thoroughfare in downtown Nairobi. The Kenyan capital boasts glass office towers, luxurious safari hotels, art galleries, and first-class restaurants. But beyond this cosmopolitan core is a teeming, crumbling Third World city. A handful of Kenyan fat cats and tourists

with their cameras and tony safari outfits are stared at with palpable envy by the impoverished hordes of "wananchi"—"the masses." Most *wananchi* live in huge, foul, densely packed shantytowns where glue-sniffing street kids prowl for garbage, and illegally distilled "chang'aa" is the primary source of income.

Unemployment approaches 50 percent in Nairobi, and crime is rampant. The Kenyan papers are filled with hair-raising tales of gangsterism, and of the crude, largely futile police war to suppress it. While I was there, the Nairobi police shot dead twenty criminal suspects in just ten days. Meanwhile, after a gang armed with Uzis and AK-47 assault rifles robbed a downtown bank in broad daylight, the fourth major bank robbery in a month, a witness told the *Daily Nation*, "When you see seven armed policemen running away, then things are hot."

Kenya's politics is every bit as volatile. During the time I was based in Kenya, not only were thousands of clash victims living as "internally displaced" refugees, but two journalists were arrested, beaten, and jailed for months after questioning the independence of the judiciary; a prominent former member of Parliament was put on trial for his life on charges widely condemned as fraudulent; the nation's doctors and university lecturers went on strike; opposition rallies were regularly banned; an opposition candidate died in a mysterious automobile accident; an opposition MP was attacked in his home with a petrol bomb; and the President's closest political confidant—"total man" Nicholas Biwott, a former Minister of Energy—remained a principal suspect in the 1990 murder of the Foreign Minister.

FROM behind every counter and every desk in every store and office the dour image of "His Excellency Daniel T. arap Moi, C.G.H., M.P., President of the Republic of Kenya and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces," stares impassively into the middle distance. The portrait is a mandatory totem of loyalty. President Moi, who succeeded Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, in 1978, personifies the rottenness of the Kenyan state. Surrounded by parasites and sycophants, Moi long ago proved himself a shrewd master of Big Man politics: tough enough to crack heads when necessary, he more often adroitly manipulates

the flow of cash as the conduit of power.

Politics in Kenya has always been a means of securing "access to the meat." Rampant corruption has sapped the economy and widened the gap between a rapacious few and the sullen *wananchi*. Companies with links to Moi have skimmed monumental sums off government contracts in wheat, oil, and land, and particularly off foreign aid. Budget allocations are sold to the highest bidder. One series of scams in the early 1990s cost Kenya the equivalent of 10 percent of its annual gross domestic product.

In the 1992 election campaign Moi's cronies established a network of "political banks" that siphoned money out of the Central Bank and pumped it into the ruling party's campaign. This brazen abuse of the monetary system to finance the bribes and blandishments of an election campaign almost doubled the money supply in six months, creating 100 percent inflation.

The idea of the state as a cash cow did not originate with Moi. The British milked Kenya for the benefit of their empire and a handful of white settlers. The British also perfected in Kenya the administrative apparatus of "indirect rule," whereby a network of appointed tribal chiefs exercised unaccountable power on behalf of an unelected sovereign. The system survived independence in 1963 and remains the basis for virtually unlimited executive power at the local level to declare emergencies, arrest and punish, and issue licenses. Elected members of Parliament cannot even address their constituents without the permission of chiefs who are accountable only to the President.

Jomo Kenyatta and members of his family amassed a huge fortune in land, precious stones, ivory, and casinos during his fifteen-year rule after independence. Kenyatta's crimes were small compared with the systematic looting of Moi's gang, but they sowed the seeds of the current malaise. Kenyatta also established the Kenyan tradition of ethnic chauvinism, bestowing the fruits of power primarily on his own people, the Kikuyu, who enjoyed privileged access to land, jobs, and education.

To no one's surprise, the Kikuyu emerged as leading opponents of Moi's regime, and they predominate in the movement toward multi-party democracy. Moi and his ruling party were returned to

power in 1992 with barely a third of the total vote, their victory owing largely to ethnic and personal divisions among the opposition parties. There was also substantial evidence of fraud and intimidation, not least in the Rift Valley, where elaborate gerrymandering left a hugely disproportionate number of parliamentary seats in a province from which nearly all non-Kalenjins had been violently expelled.

THE clashes have roots in genuine competition over land—always a sensitive issue in a largely rural country with one of the highest population-growth rates in the world. The Rift Valley was



President Daniel arap Moi

traditionally the home of pastoral groups, including the Kalenjin and the Masai. During the colonial period white settlers expropriated this fertile land. They staked out vast farms and recruited native cultivators, notably Kikuyus, Luos, and Luhyas, to work their fields. After independence, in 1963, British settlers began to sell off their lands. President Kenyatta ensured that his own people, the Kikuyu, were the primary beneficiaries.

So there has long been a reservoir of resentment and mistrust of the Kikuyu. The challenge for a beleaguered despot like Moi is to exploit that resentment—stoke it, harness it, even arm it, in order to destabilize opponents and discredit multi-partyism.

Moi and his associates have repeatedly portrayed calls for political pluralism as anti-Kalenjin. Officials refer to the Kikuyu as "aliens" and "foreigners," and to the Kalenjin and other pastoral groups as "natives" and "original inhabitants." At rallies

and on the state radio they warn that the opposition is arming itself to eliminate indigenous residents from the Rift Valley.

Moi's government sought to bolster these accusations at a nineteen-month-long show trial in which a former MP, Koigi wa Wamwere, a militant Kikuyu, was convicted of raiding a police station to acquire arms. The state's case was repeatedly discredited in court, and trial observers unanimously decried what Amnesty International called the "abusive use of the law" in Koigi's trial. Clearly, the government's aim was to cultivate a fear that Kikuyus were arming themselves. Koigi was sentenced to four years in prison and six lashes with a cane.

The Rift Valley violence coincided with calls from officials in Moi's inner circle for "*majimboism*," a federal system based on ethnicity. Proponents of *majimboism* have urged the routing of all other ethnic groups from lands occupied before the colonial era by the Kalenjin and other pastoral groups. They use the term "*madooda*"—"black spots," a chilling echo of South African terminology in the era of forced removals—to refer to land occupied by non-Kalenjins. Many Kenyans regard *majimboism* as nothing less than ethnic cleansing.

To be sure, some opposition parties are identified with ethnic groups, and they, too, engage in exclusivity. The difference is that Moi suffocates and divides his countrymen using the institutions of the state: the police, the courts, the powers of arrest and detention.

A Luhya farmer I'll call Charles, sixty-four, whose family was driven off their land by a marauding gang of Kalenjin warriors, expresses little doubt about who is responsible for his predicament. Huddled with a half dozen other embittered Luhyas in a refugee settlement near the Uganda border, Charles snorts "*Bubeyi!*"—"Lies!"—when I float Moi's argument that multi-partyism leads to tribalism. "The Kalenjin who pierce their ears—these are the people who did this to us. But it's their leaders who began this violence. If it were just a question of tribes fighting each other, then the government would have intervened."

The Kenyan government has hardly intervened. For the most part it has turned a blind eye on the attackers and has shown outright hostility toward those who have sought to investigate incidents or help the

victims. The government declared clash areas "security zones" and barred journalists from entering them. Kenya's Attorney General, Amos Wako, told me that murder charges had been brought only seventeen times in connection with the clashes (roughly one charge for every 100 murders) and had resulted in only eight convictions. "The problem is evidence," he said.

More likely, the problem is the steady erosion of the rule of law which has been one of Moi's most destructive—and ominous—legacies. Kenya has never been a full-fledged police state, but Moi has systematically eviscerated the system of law and accountability.

ONE of the most prominent political bruisers in Moi's "Rift Valley mafia" is William ole Ntimama, a flamboyant demagogue who, as Minister of Local Government, is the country's most outspoken advocate of *majimboism*. Ntimama is renowned for his fiery speeches. At the height of the clashes he warned Kikuyus that they would be "cut down to size like the Ibo" of Nigeria, who perished

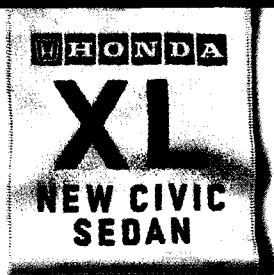
by the hundreds of thousands in the disastrous Biafran war. Ntimama is widely accused of inciting members of his own tiny pastoral group, the Masai, who have formed an alliance with the Kalenjin to drive thousands of Kikuyus off their land.

Ntimama, sixty-five, is a gregarious man with an affable laugh and a huge gap-toothed smile. He greeted me warmly in his gigantic office at the Ministry of Local Government. "The British have messed up our people," he declared. "They have actually made us part of a zoo, part of the animal kingdom. So there is a lot of bitterness."

The Masai were, in fact, marginalized by British and Kikuyu alike. They are one of Africa's last truly traditional groups, the subject of countless Western picture books that romanticize these tall, thin, nomadic cattle herders in their distinctive red blankets and bead necklaces, their earlobes pierced and stretched and their hair caked with ocher. Anyone who has been on safari in Kenya will have seen vans full of gawking tourists aiming their cameras at the Masai as if they were creatures from the wild.

"For all the marginalized people, when there is a flare or some uprising, or certain ethnic differences, it is very easy to write it off and say it is ethnic cleansing, or stirring ethnic conflict," Ntimama told me. Fair enough. But of course Ntimama is not himself among Kenya's marginalized. During three decades in politics he has proved to be a shrewd and ruthless operator. Mostly self-educated, he was born and raised in the town of Narok, on the majestic savanna that runs across much of southern Kenya. In 1974 Ntimama became the chairman of the Narok County Council, responsible for managing the Masai Mara, Kenya's most famous—and lucrative—game reserve. Thousands of tourists bearing huge quantities of hard currency visit the Mara each year to observe its breathtaking array of wildlife. Ntimama and his fellow council members have skimmed off the bulk of the Mara's gate receipts. They have granted concessions to safari-lodge builders in exchange for generous kickbacks. Ntimama has a substantial stake in Governor's Camp, one of the most expensive lodges in the reserve.

I asked Ntimama about the rule of law



in the Rift Valley. If the Masai have a just cause, is there no legal remedy? "The law applied is a discriminatory law," he replied. Should the Masai then just take the law into their own hands? "I have never told anybody to fight," Ntimama protested. Laughing, he added, "We never really cleansed anywhere other than Enoosupukia"—a village from which 10,000 Kikuyus were displaced. So, then, they did cleanse in Enoosupukia? Ntimama roared with laughter. "I deny ethnic cleansing," he declared. Did he have any idea what would happen to the refugees from Enoosupukia? "I can't say," he replied, shrugging. "Maybe the United Nations is trying to find a solution."

Later I asked Attorney General Wako why he didn't arrest Ntimama for incitement. "If you arrest Ntimama, there would be riots," Wako replied. So much for the rule of law.

WHY, then, has Kenya not disintegrated? What happened in Rwanda scared Kenya. The fact that civil war has not already occurred is an indication of how dreaded the prospect of war is. Ken-

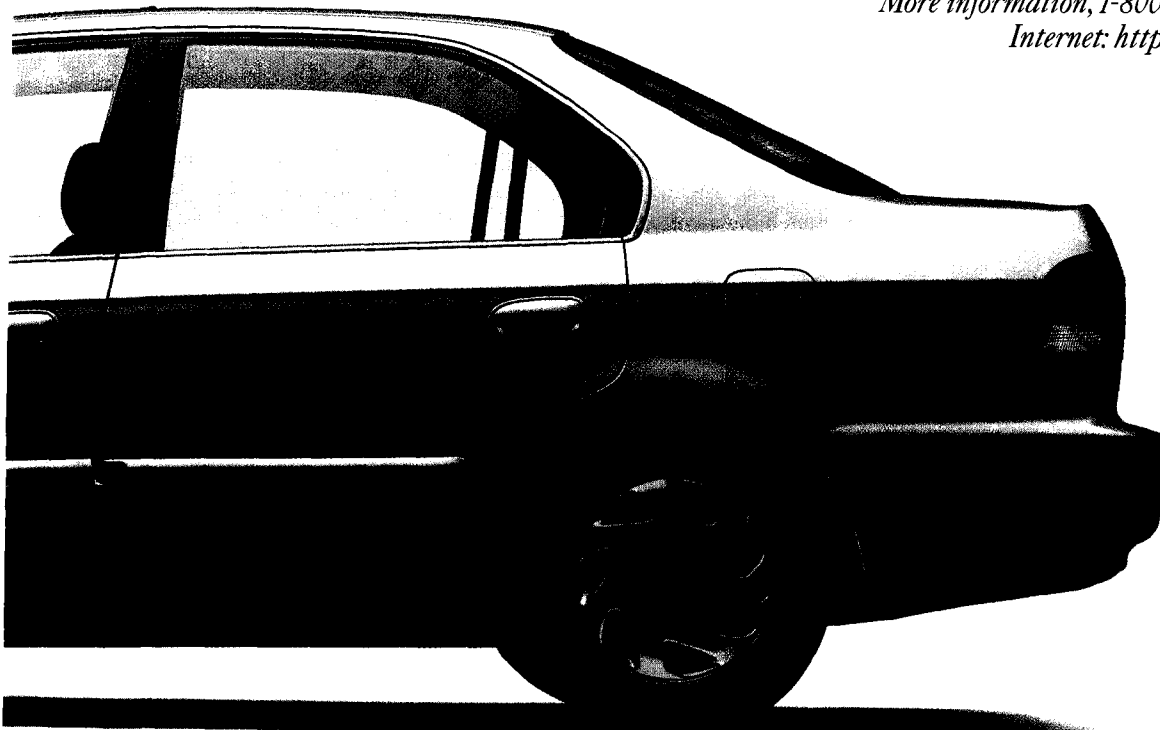
yans are no strangers to war. They fought the Mau Mau insurgency against the British in the 1950s. More than 11,000 guerrillas were killed in that war, and thousands more were detained and tortured, or displaced to horrific concentration camps, where many died. (The Mau Mau, for their part, killed only ninety-five whites, including thirty-two civilians.) Nearly all those involved in the Mau Mau struggle were Kikuyu, and Kikuyu elders have been counseling restraint.

"The memories of Mau Mau are still with us," says a man I'll call Peter, fifty-eight, another embittered Kikuyu who was driven from his farm by Kalenjin warriors. In 1953, when Peter was sixteen, his family was displaced from the Equator Ranch of the settler leader Lord Delamere. Three of his cousins, suspected Mau Mau guerrillas, were killed by Kikuyu "home guards"—natives employed by the British. "We do not favor any war or conflict, because they only bring misery," Peter says. "The most important thing we want is peace."

Kenyans generally are much better educated and better informed than their neigh-

bors. A generation of Kenyans has grown up with the benefits of relative stability, which have resulted in a substantial middle class. Elsewhere in Africa the vertical ties of ethnicity represent both the only source of identity and the only channel for economic and political power. Kenya's middle class cuts horizontally across ethnic lines. Urban Kenyans have as much in common with other urbanites as with the rural members of their groups. And the Kenyans who have been most provoked by the clashes—the Kikuyu and the Luo—are also among the best educated.

Gibson Kamau Kuria, a Kikuyu lawyer who is the dean of Kenya's human-rights movement, and who once spent ten months in prison for his advocacy, puts it this way: "The Kikuyus and the Luos are most involved in the market economy, and they were in the forefront of the struggle for independence, as well as in the move toward democracy. They understand that the problem is one of bad government and corrupt economics, not bad tribes. Once you conceptualize the problem as dealing with bad governance, then you know the solution lies in good gov-



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ernment, human rights, and sound economic management, not tribal warfare."

Rural Kenyans tend to follow the lead of their better-educated brethren. Even among the Kalenjin, many recognize that their interests don't necessarily coincide with those of Moi's tiny clique. "The Kalenjin are not a united front," says Bethwell Kipligat, a diplomat from the Nandi clan of the Kalenjin. "The Nandi leadership was aggrieved by the clashes and helped the victims. And they spoke out. This is a sign of hope."

Kenya has developed a vigorous civil society that likewise cuts across ethnic lines. This is an essential point. The

*Kenya has strength
that its neighbors never
had. The country is
not just tearing itself
apart but also struggling
mightily to hold itself
together.*

Catholic and Protestant churches, the Law Society, human-rights groups, the independent press—all have proved remarkably resilient despite years of harassment. After the Cold War the institutions of civil society blossomed with newfound support from Western donor countries. They have been prodigiously exposing, documenting, analyzing, protesting, mediating—and reducing the capacity of the state to manipulate truth. "Before, the West had supported the regime," Kipligat says. "Now the West was echoing what the civil society was saying. The civil society became stronger than the regime. There was no choice but for the President to change course."

Finally, President Moi is a shrewd survivor. He seems to realize that he cannot simply crack heads on a huge scale without paying a price. He harasses but does not crush. "Moi makes tactical retreats when he thinks he is pushing people too far," explains Kiruri Kamau, the managing editor of the embattled independent

weekly *The People*. "Moi is very cunning. He is calculating." When asked why the clashes haven't escalated, Kamau replies, "Moi realized these things had gone too far. If there is a war, Moi would stand to lose so much."

DURING the Cold War the United States poured billions of dollars into Kenya, helping to sustain Moi's patronage-based government and enrich his clique. In 1990, however, the United States suspended its aid and played a key role in inducing Moi to lift his ten-year ban on opposition parties. The U.S. ambassador at the time was Smith Hempstone, a flamboyant, outspoken right-wing newspaperman who had been appointed to this diplomatic post, his first, by his friend George Bush. Hempstone was a vociferous critic of Moi's regime. He denounced the arrests of dissidents and the shutting down of newspapers, assailed election irregularities, and went out of his way to be seen with opposition leaders. Hempstone was embraced as a hero by Kenya's fledgling democracy movement. That a major world power shared the goals of this small circle of idealists altered the psychology of all the players.

Hempstone returned home in 1993 and was replaced by Aurelia Brazeal, a career diplomat who, in contrast, projects an image of studied ambiguity. "Quiet diplomacy" is the term favored by those who believe that the differences between Brazeal and Hempstone are more of style than of substance. Kenyans call Brazeal's approach "appeasement," and they make no secret of their disappointment. Brazeal, for her part, has evidently grown tired of being compared with her predecessor. She granted me an off-the-record interview on the condition that there be no questions about Hempstone.

Brazeal has been particularly elusive on the core issue of the rule of law. At a time when the President is deploying state power to harass and intimidate opposition voices almost daily, the U.S. response has been notably muted. Publicly, at least, Brazeal has espoused a "pox on all your houses" view. In a speech she made while I was there, which was covered as the lead story in the *Sunday Nation*, she bemoaned what she called a "lack of understanding" between government and opposition. "There are not many people seeking to build a middle ground," Brazeal said.

"Kenya's political atmosphere sometimes resembles the siege of a medieval European castle, with the government refusing the opposition entry and the opposition armies catapulting missiles over the walls. What Kenya needs is the flag of truce, a ceasefire in this incessant conflict."

A nice metaphor, but in fact there is no organized violent resistance to Moi. Opposition figures, however, have been clubbed, firebombed, jailed, and tortured, and nearly all have repeatedly been barred from addressing their constituencies. In such an atmosphere the ambassador's evenhanded appeal for a "middle ground" understandably grates on Kenyan ears.

It may just be that Ambassador Brazeal lacks political intuition. The United States has pressed for economic reforms the purpose of which is to close off conduits for corruption. Evidently pleased with the results, Western donors last January pledged \$800 million in renewed assistance to Kenya. They thereby sent a signal that economic reforms need not be matched by political reforms—and repression has escalated ever since.

The question is not just whether Kenya will self-destruct but whether it will be blocked from achieving its enormous potential. Like South Africa, Kenya could be an economic locomotive for its long-suffering region—and a much-needed symbol of success. Its emancipation process needs support. An election looms in 1997. The West need not take sides in the struggle for political power, but Kenyans deserve a clear stand in favor of the institutions without which their country cannot hope to be genuinely stable: a free press, free assembly, above all the rule of law. The United States has too often operated in Africa on the assumption that lawlessness and ethnic turmoil simply go with the territory. But Africans themselves have always objected strenuously to this view.

"In Kenya we have internal refugees," says Martha Karua, a bright young lawyer in Nairobi and an opposition MP. "Just because they are small numbers compared with Rwanda or Somalia or Sudan—if you compare us with those countries, of course we are better. The international community is judging us as an African country. They look around us and say, 'Kenya is a shining light'—and that is where they are wrong." Her advice to the West: "Hold us up to the same standard, not an African standard." ☛



I'm the kind of person who, when you come to my house for a visit, starts playing my favorite records for you before you've hung up your coat. It's "Have you heard this?" and "Wait 'til you hear that!" and "Check out the new so-and-so!"

loved music but feel lost in the contemporary recording glut, I was skeptical. But I met with Steve and Martin anyway. They impressed me with their desire to create a vehicle that would appeal to people who have given up on radio's boring formats but don't have Beavis and Butthead's taste either;

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my family's old RCA Victrola back in the prehistoric 1950's. I was born to share music. I managed early in life to find a socially acceptable way to fulfill my "vocation" — I went into radio. It was 1967 when a handful of kindred spirits infused the neglected FM air-

waves with a deluge of sound, breaking the boundaries of rigid Top 40. It was The Golden Age of Free Form Progressive Radio—it lasted about two minutes. Once the suits and the salesmen saw the dollar signs on the wall they quickly put a stop to our romp through the airwaves. It was, "goodbye free form fun, hello playlist hell!"

■ Which brings me to GROOVES. When these two guys from Time-Life Music called and asked me to get involved in creating a CD and magazine that would serve as a sampler of contemporary "adult" rock 'n' roll geared to people who have always

people who would naturally love an Aimee Mann or a Son Volt if only they had the opportunity to hear them.

The missionary in me could not resist signing on as Editorial/Music Director of GROOVES.

■ So here's what we are: an independent CD and magazine dedicated to bringing to our subscribers a creatively programmed sampler of terrific current recordings from artists who have never stopped believing in the ideals of free musical expression. We feature quality work by artists with staying power—whether veterans like David Byrne and The Band or

newcomers like Lisa Loeb.

The key word here is independent. We are not dictated to by Time Life—it's just me, Steve and Martin calling the shots. We are not an extension of the record industry's promotional machine. We pick the music and license the right to use it here. We follow our ears, hearts and instincts in picking our music (the same way I've approached programming my radio show for 27 years).

We've assembled a terrific editorial and design team. We're using recycled paper and we've designed a package that allows you to store the magazine and compact disc together, in a size and

as a cohesive entity designed for repeated listenings, with thematic and lyrical threads that weave through the

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SITTING in the sun and the breeze on the deck of a hotel barge, midway between a good lunch and a good dinner, with a book and a glass of cold Diet Coke? Evian? wine? on the table before you as you survey the scene, you wave hello to an old *paysan* fishing on the green bank of the canal, admire a pair of swans swimming, and chuckle fondly at a children's kayaking class—could there be any more idyllic way to see France? You've spent the morning tramping around historic sites, and soon the barge will be tying up at a

by Barbara Wallraff

little town where you can go for a walk and buy an ice cream or a newspaper.

Last summer I spent six days floating through the Champagne region on a barge named the *Esprit*, as a guest of its owners, French Country Waterways, and I was intrigued to note that it seemed to be just a few inches narrower than the locks through which we passed several times a day on canals and rivers. The *Esprit*, like most of the dozens of hotel barges plying their trade in various regions of France, has been retrofitted with heating and air-conditioning, guest cab-

ins (the *Esprit's* are very clean and comfortable, though far from sybaritic), a dining room, a bar and lounge, and, out on deck, patio chairs, pots of geraniums, and a rack of bicycles.

Every other mode of transportation within France has limitations and disadvantages vis-à-vis barging. If you restrict yourself to planes and taxis, you are in effect turning your back on the lovely countryside. If you travel by train, you'll have to keep schlepping your bags from the station to the hotel and back. Rent a car and you'll not only have to keep packing and unpacking but also have to drive. Bicycling, too, presents the packing and unpacking problem, and it's a lot of work besides. A cruise ship will limit you to major ports on major waterways. Hotel-barge travel tends to be priced comparably to cruise travel in a nice cabin on a nice ship: about \$300 to \$500 per person per day, including all excursions, cocktails, meals, and wine. Then again, it is possible to rent a do-it-yourself barge quite inexpensively—say, \$1,000 a week for a barge that sleeps four—although doing so will not make for a logistically simple trip. The difference is like that between a good hotel and a rental condo—

except, of course, that you never have to pilot a condo or learn the drill for maneuvering it through locks. Because Europe's waterways are mostly ancient (some of the canals date back to the Romans), barging offers one other, minor advantage I hadn't expected: often towns, and grand old buildings, face the water, not the highway.

Many of the barges that now carry travelers once carried freight, but this mode of transportation is no longer particularly economical for hauling commodities around Europe, and an abundance of barges are available for sale cheap. What's more,





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Above, bicyclists on the Marne's ancient towpath. Below, the Esprit cruising on a stretch of canal

the pool of travelers whose thinking runs along the same lines as mine is ever widening. Thus hotel barges are a growth industry. I can't prove it,

but seemingly so are houseboats. In Paris on the Seine, or in any of the towns where the hotel barges visit, you'll see snug vessels tied up along the quays or the banks, with jungles of houseplants and chic natural-canvas umbrellas on deck. These tend to be owned by French people or foreign retirees, and the owners have tales to tell about their journeys as far afield as Belgium and Germany: continental Europe altogether has more than 6,000 miles of navigable inland waterways.

The hotel barges are for the most part booked and crewed by Americans and English people. On my trip last summer all thirteen guests were American (the *Esprit*, which is relatively big for a hotel barge, has space for eighteen guests; some others accommodate no more than six or eight). Five of the six crew members were young and English; the sixth, Sondrine, was young and French. They provided lovely service. One guest couple, evidently more accustomed to five-star hotels than most of us, found their attitude too informal. The cou-

ple were displeased, for example, that the crew rarely called us by name. But I was happy not to get responses like "I'm afraid the captain is unavailable just now, Ms. Wallraff." I was told instead, "Ian is showering. Would you like me to give him a message?" In general the effect was of friendly, natural, well-spoken young people doing everything they could think of to please us—and being

happy to do it. Every now and then, while we were sitting at dinner, we'd hear the crew burst into song out in the galley. They had perhaps been nipping at what was left of the good wine they'd served us the day before. (The company says that leftover wine and food are given to lock-keepers along the route.)

AH, the wine. And the cheese. At every lunch and every dinner we were served a good French red wine and a good French white, and at the end of the meal a tray of three cheeses was presented. No wine or cheese ever repeated, and each was introduced, or explained, by a member of the crew: where it was from, what the history of its name was, and so on. We all came to look forward to the droll "cheese chats," as the crew called them; we began to call them "cats du fromage." The majority of the wine

was from premier- and grand-cru vineyards: better stuff than most of us would order for ourselves day in and day out—especially in France, where a fairly ordinary bottle in a restaurant can easily run to \$40. And in a restaurant if you wanted just one more taste of the red to go with your cheese, you'd never call for another bottle. But on the *Esprit*, whenever anyone wanted, another was cheerfully brought to the table.

Each morning one of the crew went into town to buy bread and an assortment of treats from the best local bakery, and these baked goods, along with cereal, yogurt, fresh fruit, juice, and coffee, made up our breakfast buffet. As for lunch and dinner, I freely admit that we were in the care of an English chef. Ours was a live-wire kid with stiff dyed-blond hair and pants patterned with black-and-white checks the size of floor tiles, and also a kid who knew his way around a galley and knew how to set off to advantage the wonderful local ingredients—mache and morels, raspberries and Charentais melon, locally cured ham and foie gras.

AHOTEL barge offers the traveler France lite. You don't have to eat dinner at eight-thirty or nine to show that you're not some hick foreigner who doesn't know any better: dinner is served at seven-thirty. You don't have to struggle to make yourself understood: the crew speak English as well as French. You've already paid, and so you don't



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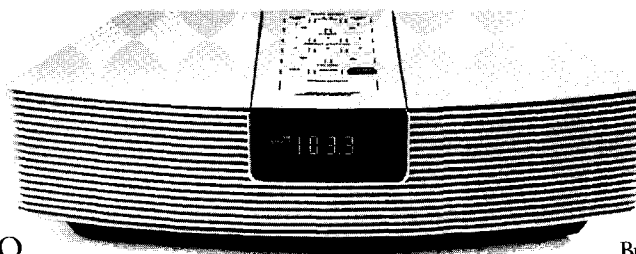
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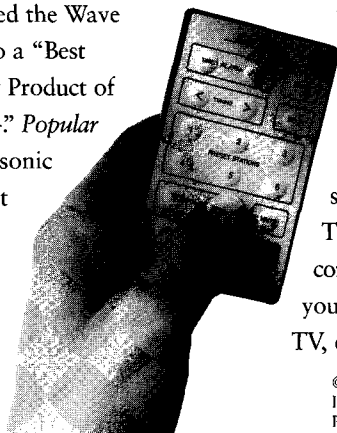
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have to keep shelling out francs, day by day, hour by hour. You don't have to puzzle over maps and menus and wine lists. You don't, frankly, have to lift a finger.

If, reading this, you are appalled at how much of the "real" France the barge traveler I am describing is missing, you might be a good candidate for renting your own barge—what hotel-barge travelers are in the midst of, after all, is about as real as France gets. You can indeed rent a barge that comes with no crew whatsoever, and what you'll need to know to get through the locks and so on is not too ambitious for adventurous people to learn on vacation. The way to take such a trip, I found from talking to those who have done it, is to plan fanatically; to travel as a group of at least four, including some stouthearted persons who won't mind the manual labor involved in getting through the locks; and to rent a car as well, tailing the barge in it in order to have it available for sightseeing excursions and food shopping.

Be that as it may, the owners of the hotel barges work diligently to get their guests out into France. A large, very comfortable motor coach traveled with the *Esprit*, sometimes following us or sneaking off to do errands while we all cruised, and sometimes carrying us to see the cathedral at Rheims, or to visit the tiny, family-owned Ployez-Jacquemart champagne vineyard and taste its goods, or to tour the Belleau Woods battlefield, cemetery, and memorial from the First World War, or to attend a beautiful private dinner at the abbey where Dom Perignon lived and worked in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

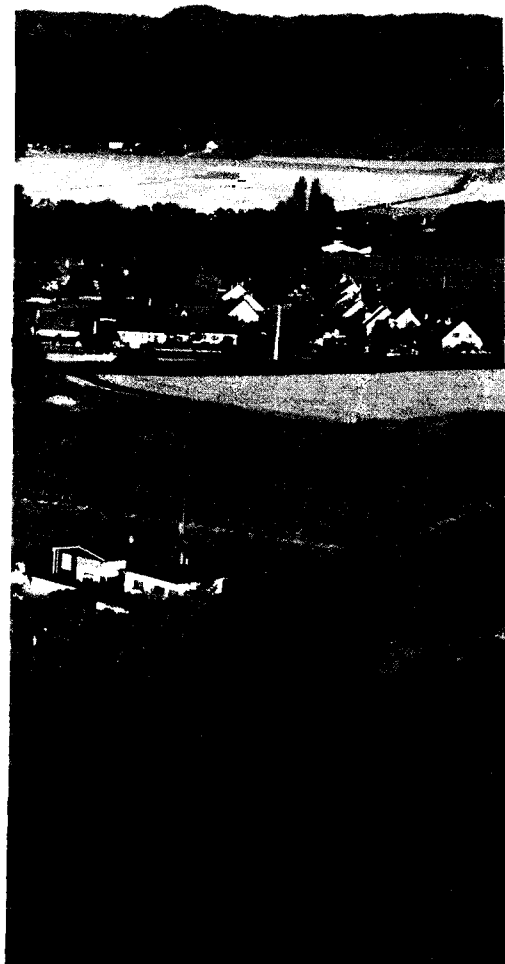
When there's nothing planned, you can concoct your own adventure if you like: the barge must stop frequently at locks, and whenever it does, you're free to hop off, perhaps taking a sturdy, balloon-tired bike with you. ("Hop" is the word: the barge is stationary and more or less level with the bank for only a few moments.)

The barge often moves at no more than a walking pace, so where there's a towpath you may walk instead if you like. The crew know which stretches of the trip are best for bicycling, and one day we asked them to put up a picnic for six of us. They packed the food on the carriers behind the seats of six bikes, and then handed the bikes ashore at a lock we reached shortly before lunchtime. We pedaled madly uphill for a half hour or so in the heat, wondering if this had been such a good idea. And then the land smoothed out and opened up, and we were coasting past vineyards and red poppies and wheat and brilliant-yellow fields of canola. It wasn't long before we found ourselves in a village, back by the river, at a picnic table in a park under huge old trees. We waved as the barge came past, leisurely finished our meal, and tidied up the empty food containers to please those dears

on the crew—and then we pedaled madly again to get to the next lock on time.

Often hotel-barge trips offer an optional hot-air-balloon excursion, and the combination is an inspired one: the barge tends to follow the lowest contours on the landscape, whereas the balloon lofts you above it. A basketload of five of us soared up from a high school soccer field one morning in the care of Vincent Dupuis, with whom French Country Waterways makes it a point to work, because he is a personable, English-speaking former world ballooning champion with an excellent safety record (his company's name is Air Adventures). As we glided along above the villages, dogs barked, cats ran, cows gaped, and plump farmwives flung open their shutters, looked up, and called to their husbands and children to come see. "*Ça va?*" Vincent would call down to them, and we would all wave. We flitted





around for an hour or so and then Vincent began looking for a place to land. Early to mid summer is the hardest time of year to find a good spot, he explained,

Above, the shadow of a hot-air balloon drifts across the Marne Valley. Below, getting ready for dinner

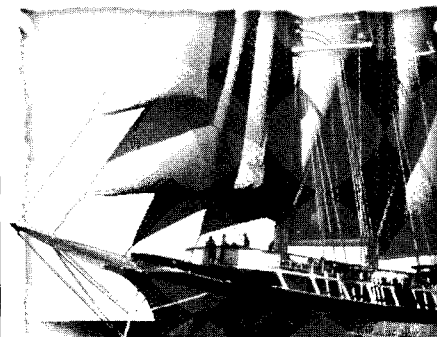
because in every field is growing something a farmer values. Sure enough, outside the towns little but the river and a quilt of bounteous agriculture was to be seen anywhere beneath us. At last we set down, very carefully, on a six-foot-wide dirt road between a field of tall wheat and a field of oats, and immediately the farmer who owned the field came driving out in his truck, with his dog, to have a look around. Vincent invited the man to join us for croissants, coffee, and champagne—a breakfast his assistant whisked from the van in which he had been following us all the while.

ANY kind of barge trip takes some thoughtful planning. The hotel-barge industry is tiny, and its “product” is not yet a commodity in the way that, say, Caribbean cruises are: even in the same

barge on the same route no two barge cruises will be alike. Obviously, the region a given barge travels through is an important consideration when you’re choosing a trip to take. (Down the Loire and on the Saône and the canals of Burgundy in September, when the vineyards are harvesting their grapes, are the classic routes, and the ones that sell out first.) The size of the barge—how many passengers it carries—will also affect how you experience your trip. In fact, the passengers themselves will be crucial to your experience, so it’s not a bad idea to quiz someone from the barge company about the others who have reservations on a trip you are interested in. Do make sure that, for example, on an eight-person barge the other people aren’t all old friends traveling together. Also while deciding what to book, make your priorities known. Are you most interested in an itinerary that includes many historic sites? In having a spacious cabin? In exploring the region’s food and wine?

This year French Country Waterways (800-222-1236) has deployed all four of its barges, including the *Esprit*, in Burgundy. Other companies continue to offer itineraries in Champagne, and in Alsace-Lorraine, Brittany, and the south. There are, as well, owner-operated barges that are not part of any larger company, and these often allow you to customize your itinerary, excursions, and menu, but they are usually available by charter only, so this option is for the most part practical only if you can assemble a traveling party of at least five or six. Information about these barges, and about the do-it-yourself ones, can be found in the Yacht Charter Guide, which many travel agents have. Or you can call the French Government Tourist Office (900-990-0040; there’s a charge of fifty cents a minute) and ask to be sent its list of barge operators.

Although it wouldn’t be especially helpful for choosing a barge (its list of operators is sorely wanting), *Waterways of Europe*, in the Insight guidebook series, is full of lovely photographs and is useful for background. I found a copy in the library on board the *Esprit*. It was a good choice one afternoon to carry into the sun and the breeze on deck, to flip through idly while I waited for another *paysan* with a fishing pole to appear round the bend. ☎



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WHY AMERICANS HATE THE MEDIA

by JAMES FALLOWS

*Why has the media establishment become so unpopular?
Perhaps the public has good reason to think that the media's self-aggrandizement
gets in the way of solving the country's real problems*

IN the late 1980s public-television stations aired a talking-heads series called *Ethics in America*. For each show more than a dozen prominent citizens sat around a horseshoe-shaped table and tried to answer troubling ethical questions posed by a moderator. The series might have seemed a good bet to be paralyzingly dull, but at least one show was riveting in its drama and tension.

The episode was taped in the fall of 1987. Its title was "Under Orders, Under Fire," and most of the panelists were former soldiers talking about the ethical dilemmas of their

work. The moderator was Charles Ogletree, a professor at Harvard Law School, who moved from panelist to panelist asking increasingly difficult questions in the law school's famous Socratic style.

During the first half of the show Ogletree made the soldiers squirm about ethical tangles on the battlefield. The man getting the roughest treatment was Frederick Downs, a writer who as a young Army lieutenant in Vietnam had lost his left arm in a mine explosion.

Ogletree asked Downs to imagine that he was a young

Mike Wallace seemed unembarrassed about feeling no connection before his eyes “simply a story.” He did not try to explain the reasons

lieutenant again. He and his platoon were in the nation of “South Kosan,” advising South Kosanese troops in their struggle against invaders from “North Kosan.” (This scenario was apparently a hybrid of the U.S. roles in the Korean and Vietnam wars.) A North Kosanese unit had captured several of Downs’s men alive—but Downs had also captured several of the North Kosanese. Downs did not know where his men were being held, but he thought his prisoners did.

And so Ogletree put the question: How far would Downs go to make a prisoner talk? Would he order him tortured? Would he torture the prisoner himself? Downs himself speculated on what he would do if he had a big knife in his hand. Would he start cutting the

William Westmoreland, who had commanded the whole U.S. force in Vietnam when Downs was serving there, deplored Downs’s decision. After all, he said, even war has its rules. An Army chaplain wrestled with how he would react if a soldier in a morally troubling position similar to Downs’s came to him privately and confessed what he had done. A Marine Corps officer juggled a related question: What would he do if he came across an American soldier who was about to torture or execute a bound and unarmed prisoner, who might be a civilian?

The soldiers disagreed among themselves. Yet in describing their decisions they used phrases like “I hope I would have the courage to . . .” and “In order to live with myself later I would . . .” The whole exercise may have been set up as a rhetorical game, but Ogletree’s questions clearly tapped into discussions the soldiers had already had about the consequences of choices they made.

Then Ogletree turned to the two most famous members of the evening’s panel, better known even than Westmoreland. These were two star TV journalists: Peter Jennings, of *World News Tonight* and ABC, and Mike Wallace, of *60 Minutes* and CBS.

Ogletree brought them into the same hypothetical war. He asked Jennings to imagine that he worked for a network that had been in contact with the enemy North Kosanese government. After much pleading Jennings and his news crew got permission from the North Kosanese to enter their country and film behind the lines. Would Jennings be willing to go? Of course, he replied. Any reporter would—and in real wars reporters from his network often had.

But while Jennings and his crew were traveling with a North Kosanese unit, to visit the site of an alleged atrocity by U.S. and South Kosanese troops, they unexpectedly crossed the trail of a small group of American and South Kosanese soldiers. With Jennings in their midst the Northern soldiers set up an ambush that would let them gun down the Americans and Southerners.

What would Jennings do? Would he tell his cameramen to “Roll tape!” as the North Kosanese opened fire? What would go through his mind as he watched the North Kosanese prepare to fire?

Jennings sat silent for about fifteen seconds. “Well, I guess I wouldn’t,” he finally said. “I am going to tell you now what I am feeling, rather than the hypothesis I drew for myself. If I were with a North Kosanese unit that came upon Americans, I think that I personally would do what I could to warn the Americans.”

prisoner?

When would he make himself stop, if the prisoner just wouldn’t talk?

Downs did not shrink from the questions or the implications of his answers. He wouldn’t enjoy doing it, he told Ogletree. He would have to live with the consequences for the rest of his life. But yes, he would torture the captive. He would use the knife. Implicit in his answers was the idea that he would do the cutting himself and would listen to the captive scream. He would do whatever was necessary to try to save his own men. While explaining his decisions Downs sometimes gestured with his left hand for emphasis. The hand was a metal hook.

Ogletree worked his way through the other military officials, asking all how they reacted to Frederick Downs’s choice.



to the soldiers in his country's army or considering their deaths a reporter might feel obliged to remain silent as the attack began.

Even if it meant losing the story? Ogletree asked.

Even though it would almost certainly mean losing my life, Jennings replied. "But I do not think that I could bring myself to participate in that act. That's purely personal, and other reporters might have a different reaction."

Ogletree turned for reaction to Mike Wallace, who immediately replied. "I think some other reporters *would* have a different reaction," he said, obviously referring to himself. "They would regard it simply as another story they were there to cover." A moment later Wallace said, "I am astonished, really." He turned toward Jennings and began to lecture him: "You're a *reporter*. Granted you're an American" (at least for purposes of the fictional example; Jennings has actually retained Canadian citizenship). "I'm a little bit at a loss to understand why, because you're an American, you would not have covered that story."

Ogletree pushed Wallace. Didn't Jennings have some higher duty to do something other than just roll film as soldiers from his own country were being shot?

"No," Wallace said flatly and immediately. "You don't have a higher duty. No. No. You're a reporter!"

Jennings backtracked fast. Wallace was right, he said: "I chickened out." Jennings said that he had "played the hypothetical very hard." He had lost sight of his journalistic duty to remain detached.

As Jennings said he agreed with Wallace, several soldiers in the room seemed to regard the two of them with horror. Retired Air Force General Brent Scowcroft, who would soon become George Bush's National Security Advisor, said it was simply wrong to stand and watch as your side was slaughtered. "What's it *worth*?" he asked Wallace bitterly. "It's worth thirty seconds on the evening news, as opposed to saving a platoon."

After a brief discussion between Wallace and Scowcroft, Ogletree reminded Wallace of Scowcroft's basic question. What was it worth for the reporter to stand by, looking? Shouldn't the reporter have said *something*?

Wallace gave a disarming grin, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "I don't know." He later mentioned extreme circumstances in which he thought journalists should intervene. But at that moment he seemed to be mugging to the crowd with a "Don't ask me!" expression, and in fact he drew a big laugh—the first such moment in the discussion. Jennings, however, was all business, and was still concerned about the first answer he had given.

"I wish I had made another decision," Jennings said, as if asking permission to live the past five minutes over again. "I would like to have made his decision"—that is, Wallace's decision to keep on filming.

A few minutes later Ogletree turned to George M. Connell, a Marine colonel in full uniform. Jaw muscles flexing in anger, with stress on each word, Connell said, "I feel utter contempt."

Two days after this hypothetical episode, Connell said, Jennings or Wallace might be back with the American forces—and could be wounded by stray fire, as combat journalists often had been before. When that happens, he said, they are "just journalists." Yet they would expect American soldiers to run out under enemy fire and drag them back, rather than leaving them to bleed to death on the battlefield.

"I'll do it!" Connell said. "And that is what makes me so contemptuous of them. Marines will die going to get . . . a couple of journalists." The last words dripped disgust.

Not even Ogletree knew what to say. There was dead silence for several seconds. Then a square-jawed man with neat gray hair and aviator glasses spoke up. It was Newt Gingrich, looking a generation younger and trimmer than he would when he became speaker of the House, in 1995. One thing was clear from this exercise, Gingrich said. "The military has done a vastly better job of systematically thinking through the ethics of behavior in a violent environment than the journalists have."

That was about the mildest way to put it. Although Wallace and Jennings conceded that the criticism was fair—if journalists considered themselves "detached," they could not logically expect American soldiers to rescue them—nevertheless their reactions spoke volumes about the values of their craft. Jennings was made to feel embarrassed about his natural, decent human impulse. Wallace seemed unembarrassed about feeling no connection to the soldiers in his country's army or considering their deaths before his eyes "simply a story." In other important occupations people sometimes face the need to do the horrible. Frederick Downs, after all, was willing to torture a man and hear him scream. But Downs had thought through all the consequences and alternatives, and he knew he would live with the horror for the rest of his days. When Mike Wallace said he would do something horrible, he barely bothered to give a rationale. He did not try to explain the reasons a reporter might feel obliged to remain silent as the attack began—for instance, that in combat reporters must be beyond country, or that they have a duty to bear impartial witness to deaths on either side, or that Jennings had implicitly made a promise not to betray the North Kosanese when he agreed to accompany them. The soldiers might or might not have found such arguments convincing; Wallace didn't even make them.

NOT ISSUES BUT THE GAME OF POLITICS

A GENERATION ago political talk programs were sleepy Sunday-morning affairs. The Secretary of State or the Senate majority leader would show up to answer questions from Lawrence Spivak or Bob Clark, and after thirty minutes another stately episode of *Meet the Press* or *Issues and Answers* would be history.

Everything in public life is “brighter” and more “interesting” now. Constant competition from the weekday trash-talk shows has forced anything involving political life to liven up. Under pressure from the Saturday political-talk shows—*The McLaughlin Group* and its many disorderly descendants—even the Sunday-morning shows have put on rouge and push-up bras.

Meet the Press, moderated by Tim Russert, is probably the meatiest of these programs. High-powered guests discuss serious topics with Russert, who worked for years in politics, and with veteran reporters. Yet the pressure to keep things lively means that squabbling replaces dialogue.

The discussion shows that are supposed to enhance public understanding may actually reduce it, by hammering home the message that issues don't matter except as items for politicians to fight over. Some politicians in Washington may indeed view all issues as mere tools to use against their opponents. But far from offsetting this view of public life, the national press often encourages it. As Washington-based talk shows have become more popular in the past decade, they have had a trickle-down effect in cities across the country. In Seattle, in Los Angeles, in Boston, in Atlanta, journalists gain notice and influence by appearing regularly on talk shows—and during those appearances they mainly talk about the game of politics.

In the 1992 presidential campaign candidates spent more time answering questions from “ordinary people”—citizens in town-hall forums, callers on radio and TV talk shows—than they had in previous years. The citizens asked overwhelmingly about the *what* of politics: What are you going to do about the health-care system? What can you do to reduce the cost of welfare? The reporters asked almost exclusively about the *how*: How are you going to try to take away Perot's constituency? How do you answer charges that you have flip-flopped?

After the 1992 campaign the contrast between questions from citizens and those from reporters was widely discussed in journalism reviews and postmortems on campaign coverage. Reporters acknowledged that they should try harder to ask questions about things their readers and viewers seemed to care about—that is, questions about the differences that political choices would make in people's lives.

In January of last year there was a chance to see how well the lesson had sunk in. In the days just before and after Bill Clinton delivered his State of the Union address to the new

Republican-controlled Congress, he answered questions in a wide variety of forums in order to explain his plans.

On January 31, a week after the speech, the President flew to Boston and took questions from a group of teenagers. Their questions concerned the effects of legislation or government programs on their communities or schools. These were the questions (paraphrased in some cases):

- “We need stronger laws to punish those people who are caught selling guns to our youth. Basically, what can you do about that?”
- “I notice that often it's the media that is responsible for the negative portrayal of young people in our society.” What can political leaders do to persuade the media that there is good news about youth?
- Apprenticeship programs and other ways to provide job training have been valuable for students not going to college. Can the Administration promote more of these programs?
- Programs designed to keep teenagers away from drugs and gangs often emphasize sports and seem geared mainly to boys. How can such programs be made more attractive to teenage girls?
- What is it like at Oxford? (This was from a student who was completing a new alternative-school curriculum in the Boston public schools, and who had been accepted at Oxford.)
- “We need more police officers who are trained to deal with all the other different cultures in our cities.” What can the government do about that?
- “In Boston, Northeastern University has created a model of scholarships and other supports to help inner-city kids get to and stay in college. . . . As President, can you urge colleges across the country to do what Northeastern has done?”

Earlier in the month the President's performance had been assessed by the three network-news anchors: Peter Jennings, of ABC; Dan Rather, of CBS; and Tom Brokaw, of NBC. There was no overlap whatsoever between the questions the students asked and those raised by the anchors. None of the questions from these news professionals concerned the impact of legislation or politics on people's lives. Nearly all concerned the struggle for individual advancement among candidates.

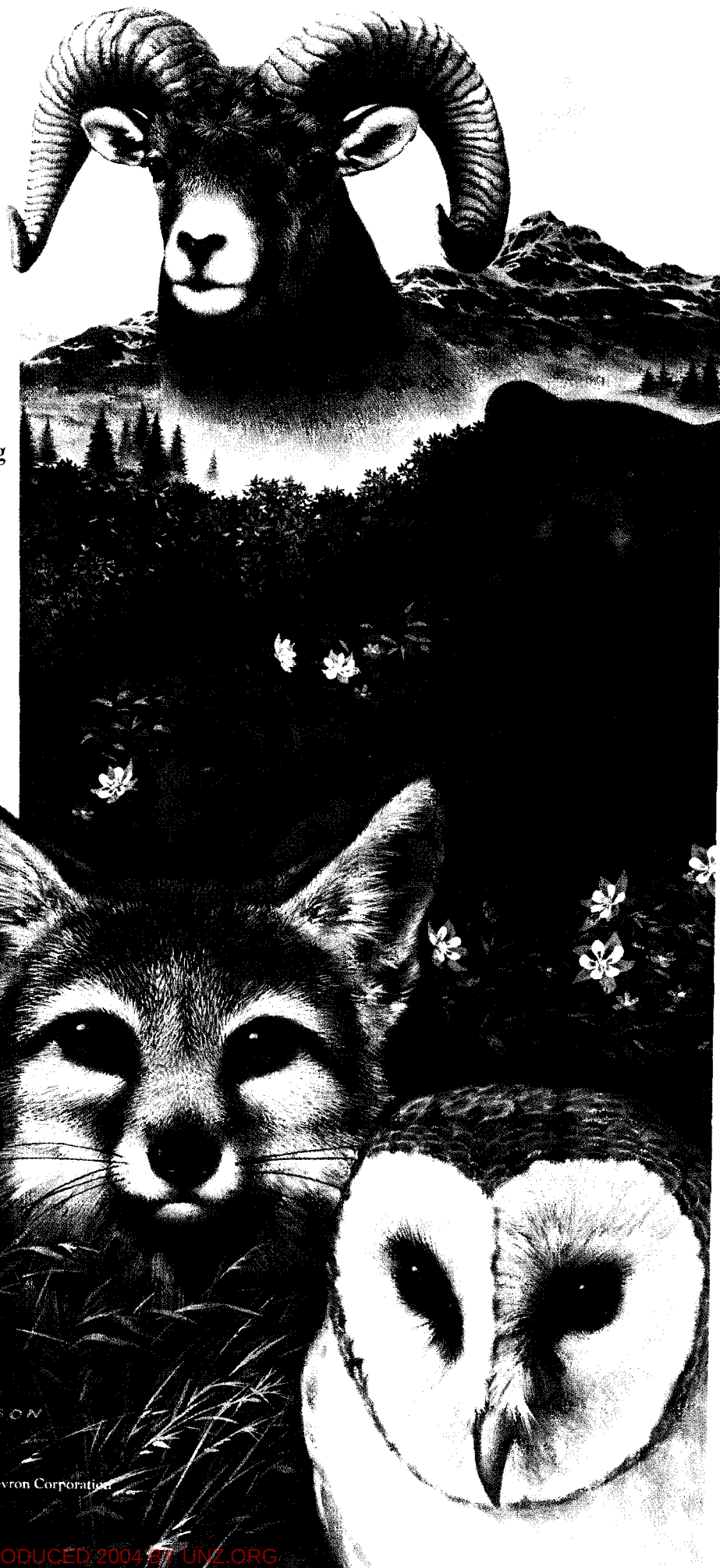
Peter Jennings, who met with Clinton as the Gingrich-Dole Congress was getting under way, asked whether Clinton had been eclipsed as a political leader by the Republicans. Dan Rather did interviews through January with prominent politicians—Senators Edward Kennedy, Phil Gramm, and Bob Dole—building up to a profile of Clinton two days after the State of the Union address. Every question he asked was about popularity or political tactics. He asked Phil Gramm to guess whether Newt Gingrich would enter the race (no) and whether Bill Clinton would be renominated by his party (yes). He asked Bob Dole what kind of mood the President seemed to be in, and whether Dole and Gin-

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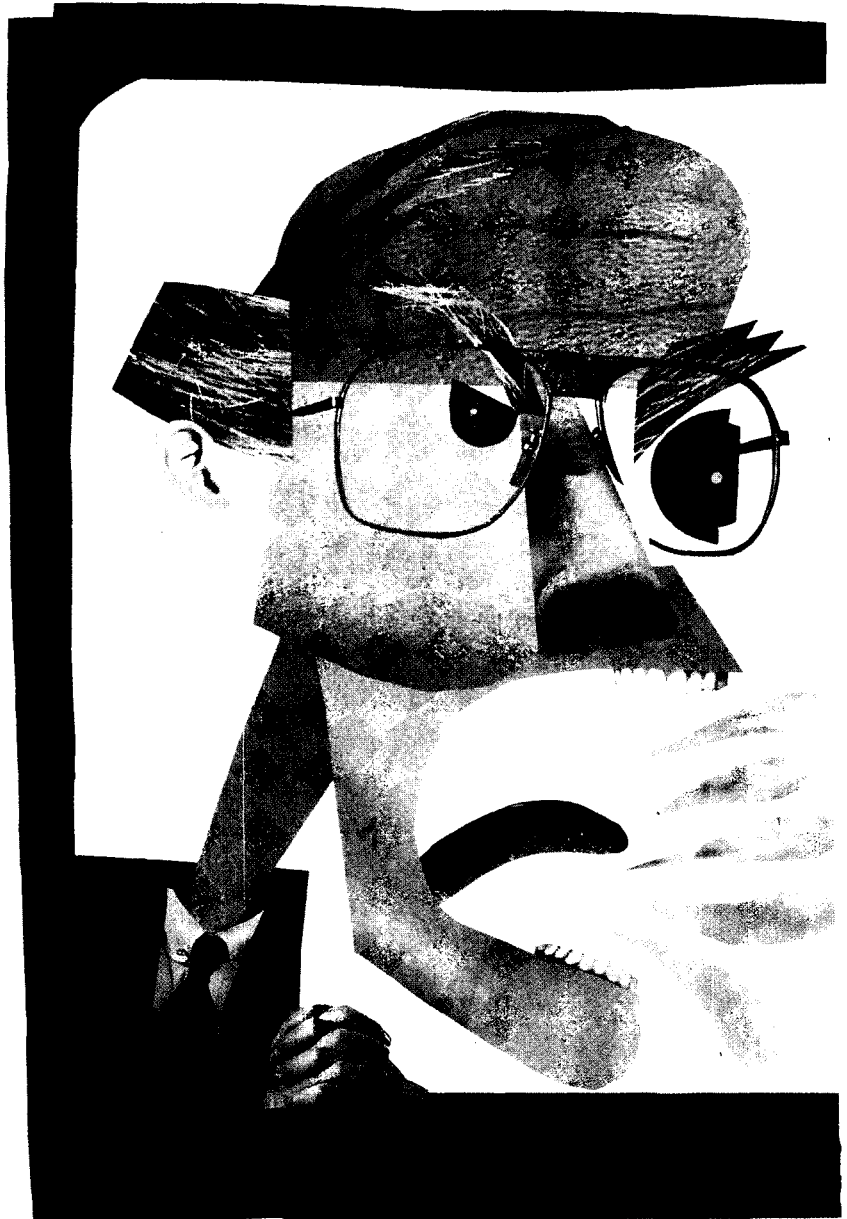
grich were, in effect, the new bosses of Washington. When Edward Kennedy began giving his views about the balanced-budget amendment, Rather steered him back on course: "Senator, you know I'd talk about these things the rest of the afternoon, but let's move quickly to politics. Do you expect Bill Clinton to be the Democratic nominee for re-election in 1996?"

The *CBS Evening News* profile of Clinton, which was narrated by Rather and was presented as part of the series *Eye on America*, contained no mention of Clinton's economic policy, his tax or budget plans, his failed attempt to pass a health-care proposal, his successful attempt to ratify NAFTA, his efforts to "reinvent government," or any substantive aspect of his proposals or plans in office. Its subject was exclusively Clinton's handling of his office—his "difficulty making decisions," his "waffling" at crucial moments. If Rather or his colleagues had any interest in the content of Clinton's speech as opposed to its political effect, neither the questions they asked nor the reports they aired revealed such a concern.

Tom Brokaw's questions were more substantive, but even he concentrated mainly on politics of the moment. How did the President feel about a poll showing that 61 percent of the public felt that he had no "strong convictions" and could be "easily swayed"? What did Bill Clinton think about Newt Gingrich? "Do you think he plays fair?" How did he like it that people kept shooting at the White House?

When ordinary citizens have a chance to pose questions to political leaders, they rarely ask about the game of politics. They want to know how the reality of politics will affect them—through taxes, programs, scholarship funds, wars. Journalists justify their intrusiveness and excesses by claiming that they are the public's representatives, asking the questions their fellow citizens would ask if they had the privilege of meeting with Presidents and senators. In fact they ask questions that only their fellow political professionals care about. And they often do so—as at the typical White House news conference—with a discourtesy and rancor that represent the public's views much less than they reflect the modern journalist's belief that being independent boils down to acting hostile.

In town-hall forums and on talk shows, citizens asked about the *how*: How are you going to try to take away Perot's constituency?



REDUCTIO AD ELECTIONEM: THE ONE-TRACK MIND

THE limited curiosity that elite reporters display in their questions is also evident in the stories they write once they have received answers. They are interested mainly in pure politics and can be coerced into examining the substance of an issue only as a last resort. The subtle but sure result is a stream of daily messages that the real meaning of public life is the struggle of Bob Dole against Newt Gingrich against Bill Clinton, rather than our collective efforts to solve collective problems.



The natural instinct of newspapers and TV is to present every public issue as if its “real” meaning were political in the meanest and narrowest sense of that term—the attempt by parties and candidates to gain an advantage over their rivals. Reporters do, of course, write stories about political life in the broader sense and about the substance of issues—the pluses and minuses of diplomatic recognition for Vietnam, the difficulties of holding down the Medicare budget, whether immigrants help or hurt the nation’s economic base. But when there is a chance to use these issues as props or raw material for a story about political tactics, most reporters leap at it. It is more fun—and easier—to write about Bill

Clinton’s “positioning” on the Vietnam issue, or how Newt Gingrich is “handling” the need to cut Medicare, than it is to look into the issues themselves.

Examples of this preference occur so often that they’re difficult to notice. But every morning’s newspaper, along with every evening’s newscast, reveals this pattern of thought.

- Last February, when the Democratic President and the Republican Congress were fighting over how much federal money would go to local law-enforcement agencies, one network-news broadcast showed a clip of Gingrich denouncing Clinton and another of Clinton standing in front of a sea of uniformed police officers while making a tough-on-crime speech. The correspondent’s sign-off line was “The White House thinks ‘cops on the beat’ has a simple but appealing ring to it.” That is, the President was pushing the plan because it would sound good in his campaign ads. Whether or not that was Clinton’s real motive, nothing in the broadcast gave the slightest hint of where the extra policemen would go, how much they might cost, whether there was reason to think they’d do any good. Everything in the story suggested that the crime bill mattered only as a chapter in the real saga, which was the struggle between Bill and Newt.
- Last April, after the explosion at the federal building in Oklahoma City, discussion changed quickly from the event itself to politicians’ “handling” of the event. On the Sunday after the blast President Clinton announced a series of new anti-terrorism measures. The next morning, on

National Public Radio’s *Morning Edition*, Cokie Roberts was asked about the prospects of the proposals’ taking effect. “In some ways it’s not even the point,” she replied. What mattered was that Clinton “looked good” taking the tough side of the issue. No one expects Cokie Roberts or other political correspondents to be experts on controlling terrorism, negotiating with the Syrians, or the other specific measures on which Presidents make stands. But all issues are shoehorned into the area of expertise the most-prominent correspondents do have: the struggle for one-upmanship among a handful of political leaders.

- When health-care reform was the focus of big political bat-

what of politics. The reporters asked almost exclusively about the
How do you answer charges that you have flip-flopped?

ties between Republicans and Democrats, it was on the front page and the evening newscast every day. When the Clinton Administration declared defeat in 1994 and there were no more battles to be fought, health-care news coverage virtually stopped too—even though the medical system still represented one seventh of the economy, even though HMOs and corporations and hospitals and pharmaceutical companies were rapidly changing policies in the face of ever-rising costs. Health care was no longer political news, and therefore it was no longer interesting news.

- After California's voters approved Proposition 187 in the 1994 elections, drastically limiting the benefits available to illegal immigrants, the national press ran a trickle of stories on what this would mean for California's economy, its school and legal systems, even its relations with Mexico. A flood of stories examined the political impact of the immigration issue—how the Republicans might exploit it, how the Democrats might be divided by it, whether it might propel Pete Wilson to the White House.

- On August 16 last year Bill Bradley announced that after representing New Jersey in the Senate for three terms he would not run for a fourth term. In interviews and at the news conferences he conducted afterward Bradley did his best to talk about the deep problems of public life and economic adjustment that had left him frustrated with the political process. Each of the parties had locked itself into rigid positions that kept it from dealing with the realistic concerns of ordinary people, he said. American corporations were doing what they had to do for survival in international competition: they were downsizing and making themselves radically more efficient and productive. But the result was to leave "decent, hardworking Americans" more vulnerable to layoffs and the loss of their careers, medical coverage, pension rights, and social standing than they had been in decades. Somehow, Bradley said, we had to move past the focus on short-term political maneuvering and determine how to deal with the forces that were leaving Americans frustrated and insecure.

That, at least, was what Bill Bradley said. What turned up in

the press was almost exclusively speculation about what the move meant for this year's presidential race and the party lineup on Capitol Hill. Might Bradley challenge Bill Clinton in the Democratic primaries? If not, was he preparing for an independent run? Could the Democrats come up with any other candidate capable of holding on to Bradley's seat? Wasn't this a slap in the face for Bill Clinton and the party he purported to lead? In the aftermath of Bradley's announcement prominent TV and newspaper reporters competed to come up with the shrewdest analysis of the political impact of the move. None of the country's major papers or networks used Bradley's announcement as a news peg for an analysis of the real issues he had raised.

The day after his announcement Bradley was interviewed by Judy Woodruff on the CNN program *Inside Politics*.

Woodruff is a widely respected and knowledgeable reporter, but her interaction with Bradley was like the meeting of two beings from different universes. Every answer Bradley gave was about the substance of national problems that concerned him. Every one of Woodruff's responses or questions was about short-term political tactics. Woodruff asked about the political implications of his move for Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich. Bradley replied that it was more important to concentrate on the difficulties both parties had in dealing with real national problems.

Midway through the interview Bradley gave a long answer to the effect that everyone involved in politics had to get out of the rut of converting

every subject or comment into a political "issue," used for partisan advantage. Let's stop talking, Bradley said, about who will win what race and start responding to one another's ideas.

As soon as he finished, Woodruff asked her next question: "Do you want to be President?" It was as if she had not heard a word he had been saying—or *couldn't* hear it, because the media's language of political analysis is utterly separate from the terms in which people describe real problems in their lives.

The effect is as if the discussion of every new advance





WHEN MRS. GARRISON TEACHES TOLERANCE, HER STUDENTS REALLY EAT IT UP.



The seventh graders in Barbara Garrison's English class learn a lesson in tolerance by joining in celebrations from around the world. Chinese New Year brings Good Luck Candy and lotus seeds.



Burning incense marks the start of Ramadan, the Islamic Holy Month. At Kwanzaa time, an African-American festival, traditional foods are sampled, like "Hopping John" and ground nut soup. Mrs. Garrison hopes this taste of world culture will help her students become more respectful of other ways of life.

For opening the minds (and mouths) of young people, and for confronting prejudices where they start, State Farm is pleased to present the Good Neighbor Award to Barbara Garrison of San Diego's Mar Vista Middle School, along with \$5,000 to the educational institution of her choice.



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in medicine boiled down to speculation about whether its creator would win the Nobel Prize that year. Regardless of the tone of coverage, medical research will go on. But a relentless emphasis on the cynical game of politics threatens public life itself, by implying day after day that the political sphere is nothing more than an arena in which ambitious politicians struggle for dominance, rather than a structure in which citizens can deal with worrisome collective problems.

POINTLESS PREDICTION: THE POLITICAL EXPERTS

ON Sunday, November 6, 1994, two days before the congressional elections that swept the Republicans to power, *The Washington Post* published the results of its "Crystal Ball" poll. Fourteen prominent journalists, pollsters, and all-around analysts made their predictions about how many seats each party would win in the House and Senate and how many governorships each would take.

One week later many of these same experts would be saying on their talk shows that the Republican landslide was "inevitable" and "a long time coming" and "a sign of deep discontent in the heartland." But before the returns were in, how many of the fourteen experts predicted that the Republicans would win both houses of Congress and that Newt Gingrich would be speaker? Exactly three.

What is interesting about this event is not just that so many experts could be so wrong. Immediately after the election even Newt Gingrich seemed dazed by the idea that the forty-year reign of the Democrats in the House had actually come to an end. Rather, the episode said something about the futility of political prediction itself—a task to which the big-time press devotes enormous effort and time. *Two days* before the election many of the country's most admired analysts had no idea what was about to happen. Yet within a matter of weeks these same people, unfazed, would be writing articles and giving speeches and being quoted about who was "ahead" and "behind" in the emerging race for the White House in 1996.

As with medieval doctors who applied leeches and trepanned skulls, the practitioners cannot be blamed for the limits of their profession. But we can ask why reporters spend so much time directing our attention toward what is not much more than guesswork on their part. It builds the impression that journalism is about what's entertaining—guessing what might or might not happen next month—rather than what's useful, such as extracting lessons of success and failure from events that have already occurred. Competing predictions add almost nothing to our ability to solve public problems or to make sensible choices among complex alternatives. Yet such useless distractions have become a specialty of the political press. They are easy to

produce, they allow reporters to act as if they possessed special inside knowledge, and there are no consequences for being wrong.

SPOON-FEEDING: THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS CORPS

IN the early spring of last year, when Newt Gingrich was dominating the news from Washington and the O. J. Simpson trial was dominating the news as a whole, *The Washington Post* ran an article about the pathos of the White House press room. Nobody wanted to hear what the President was doing, so the people who cover the President could not get on the air. Howard Kurtz, the *Post's* media writer, described the human cost of this political change:

Brit Hume is in his closet-size White House cubicle, watching Kato Kaelin testify on CNN. Bill Plante, in the adjoining cubicle, has his feet up and is buried in the *New York Times*. Brian Williams is in the corridor, idling away the time with Jim Miklaszewski.

An announcement is made for a bill-signing ceremony. Some of America's highest-paid television correspondents begin ambling toward the pressroom door.

"Are you coming with us?" Williams asks.

"I guess so," says Hume, looking forlorn.

The White House spokesman, Mike McCurry, told Kurtz that there was some benefit to the enforced silence: "Brit Hume has now got his crossword puzzle capacity down to record time. And some of the reporters have been out on the lecture circuit."

The deadpan restraint with which Kurtz told this story is admirable. But the question many readers would want to scream at the idle correspondents is *Why don't you go out and do some work?*

Why not go out and interview someone, even if you're not going to get any airtime that night? Why not escape the monotonous tyranny of the White House press room, which reporters are always complaining about? The knowledge that O.J. will keep you off the air yet again should liberate you to look into those stories you never "had time" to deal with before. Why not *read a book*—about welfare reform, about Russia or China, about race relations, about anything? Why not imagine, just for a moment, that your journalistic duty might involve something more varied and constructive than doing standups from the White House lawn and sounding skeptical about whatever announcement the President's spokesman put out that day?

What might these well-paid, well-trained correspondents have done while waiting for the O.J. trial to become boring enough that they could get back on the air? They might have tried to learn something that would be of use to their viewers when the story of the moment went away. Without leaving Washington, without going farther than ten minutes by taxi from the White House (so that they could be on hand if a

Let's stop talking, Senator Bill Bradley said, about who will win another's ideas. As soon as he finished, Judy Woodruff asked her

sudden press conference was called), they could have prepared themselves to discuss the substance of issues that affect the public.

For example, two years earlier Vice President Al Gore had announced an ambitious plan to "reinvent" the federal government. Had it made any difference, either in improving the performance of government or in reducing its cost, or was it all for show? Republicans and Democrats were sure to spend the next few months fighting about cuts in the capital-gains tax. Capital-gains tax rates were higher in some countries and lower in others. What did the experience of these countries show about whether cutting the rates helped an economy to grow? The rate of immigration was rising again, and in California and Florida it was becoming an important political issue. What was the latest evidence on the economic and social effects of immigration? Should Americans feel confident or threatened that so many foreigners were trying to make their way in? Soon both political parties would be advancing plans to reform the welfare system. Within a two-mile radius of the White House lived plenty of families on welfare. Why not go and see how the system had affected them, and what they would do if it changed? The federal government had gone further than most private industries in trying to open opportunities to racial minorities and women. The Pentagon had gone furthest of all. What did people involved in this process—men and women, blacks and whites—think about its successes and failures? What light did their experience shed on the impending affirmative-action debate?

The list could go on for pages. With a few minutes' effort—about as long as it takes to do a crossword puzzle—the correspondents could have drawn up lists of other subjects they had never before "had time" to investigate. They had the time now. What they lacked was a sense that their responsibility involved something more than standing up to rehash the day's announcements when there was room for them on the news.

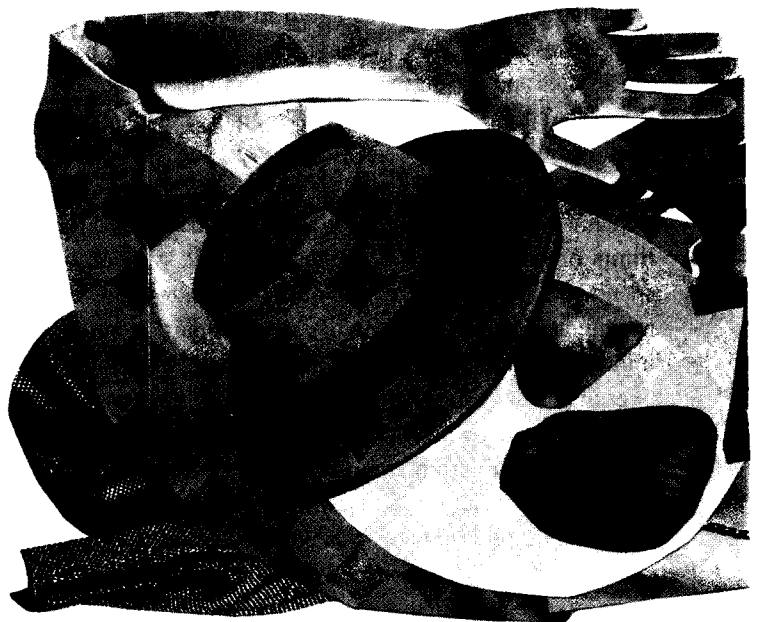
GLASS HOUSES: JOURNALISTS AND FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

HALF a century ago reporters knew but didn't say that Franklin D. Roosevelt was in a wheelchair. A generation ago many reporters knew but didn't write about John F. Kennedy's insatiable appetite for women. For several months in the early Clinton era reporters knew about but didn't disclose Paula Jones's allegation that, as governor

of Arkansas, Bill Clinton had exposed himself to her. Eventually this claim found its way into all the major newspapers, proving that there is no longer any such thing as an accusation too embarrassing to be printed if it seems to bear on a politician's "character."

It is not just the President who has given up his privacy in the name of the public's right to know. Over the past two decades officials whose power is tiny compared with the President's have had to reveal embarrassing details about what most Americans consider very private matters: their income and wealth. Each of the more than 3,000 people appointed by the President to executive-branch jobs must reveal previous sources of income and summarize his or her financial holdings. Congressmen have changed their rules to forbid themselves to accept honoraria for speaking to interest groups or lobbyists. The money that politicians do raise from individuals and groups must be disclosed to the Federal Election Commission. The information they disclose is available to the public and appears often in publications, most prominently *The Washington Post*.

No one contends that every contribution makes every politician corrupt. But financial disclosure has become commonplace on the "Better safe than sorry" principle. If politicians and officials are not corrupt, the reasoning goes, they have nothing to fear from letting their finances be publicized. And if they are corrupt, public disclosure is a way to stop them before they do too much



what race and start responding to one
next question: "Do you want to be President?"

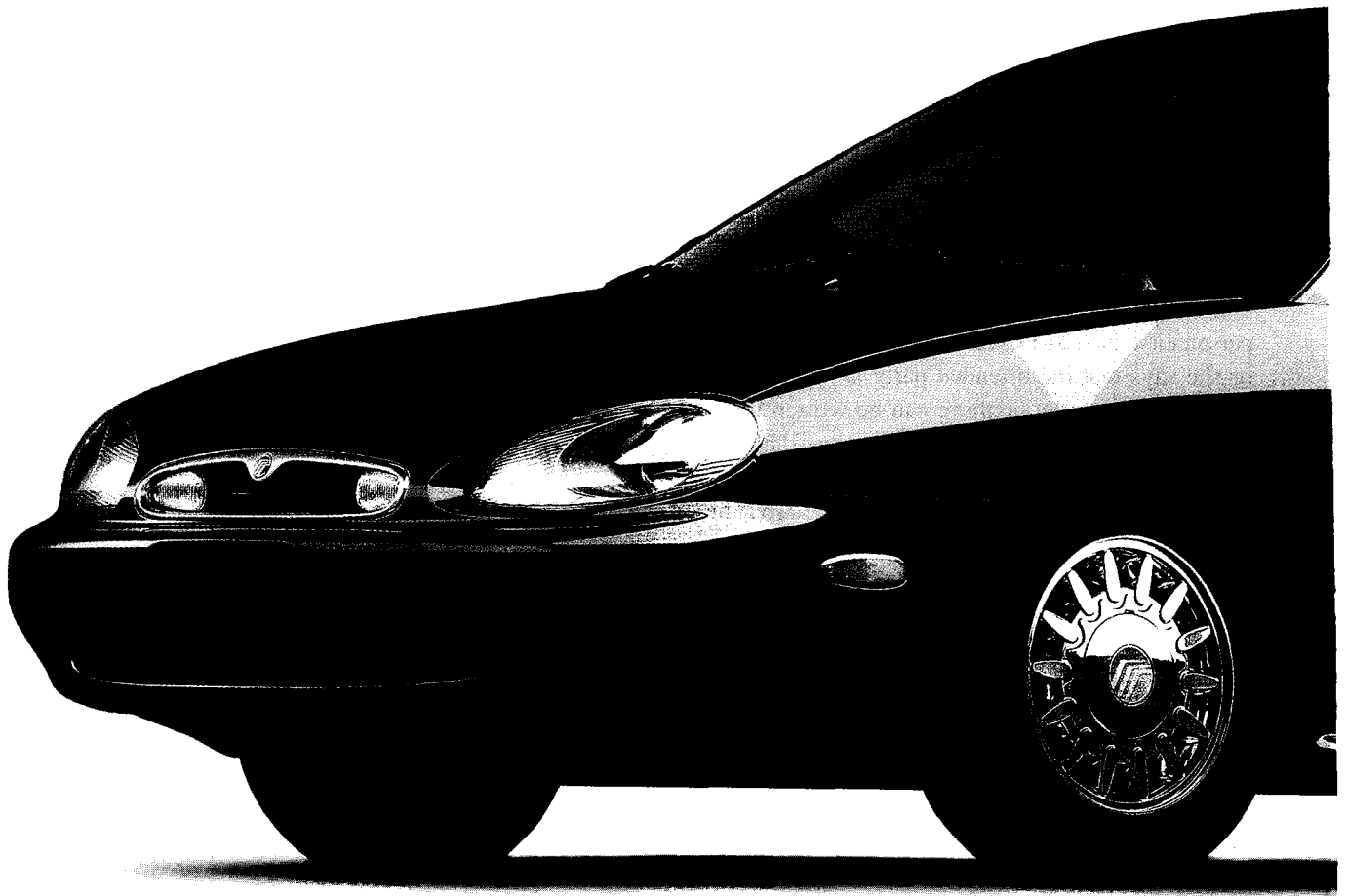
harm. The process may be embarrassing, but this is the cost of public life.

How different the "Better safe than sorry" calculation seems when journalists are involved! Reporters and pundits hold no elected office, but they are obviously public figures. The most prominent TV-talk-show personalities are better known than all but a handful of congressmen. When politicians and pundits sit alongside one another on Washington talk shows and trade opinions, they underscore the essential similarity of their political roles. The pundits have no vote in Congress, but the overall political impact of a word from George Will, Ted Koppel, William Safire, or any of their colleagues who run the major editorial pages dwarfs anything a third-term congressman could do. If an interest group had the choice of buying the favor of one prominent media figure or of two junior congressmen, it wouldn't even have to think about the decision. The pundit is obviously more valuable.

If a reporter is sued for libel by a prominent but unelected personality, such as David Letterman or Donald Trump, he or she says that the offended party is a "public figure"—about whom nearly anything can be written in the press. Public figures, according to the rulings that shape today's libel law, can win a libel suit only if they can prove that a reporter knew that what he or she



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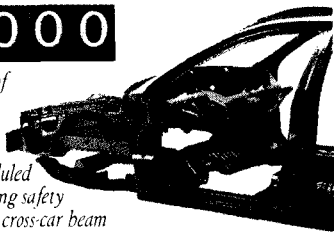
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was writing was false, or had “reckless disregard” for its truth, and went ahead and published it anyway. Public figures, according to the law, pay a price for being well known. And who are these people? The category is not limited to those who hold public office but includes all who “thrust themselves into the public eye.” Most journalists would eloquently argue the logic of this broad definition of public figures—until the same standard was applied to them.

In 1993 Sam Donaldson, of ABC, described himself in an interview as being in touch with the concerns of the average American. “I’m trying to get a little ranching business started in New Mexico,” he said. “I’ve got five people on the payroll. I’m making out those government forms.” Thus he understood the travails of the small businessman and the annoyances of government regulation. Donaldson, whose base pay from ABC is reported to be some \$2 million a year, did not point out that his several ranches in New Mexico together covered some 20,000 acres. When doing a segment attacking farm subsidies on *Prime Time Live* in 1993 he did not point out that “those government forms” allowed him to claim nearly \$97,000 in sheep and mohair subsidies over two years. William Neuman, a reporter for the *New York Post*, said that when his photographer tried to take pictures of Donaldson’s ranch house, Donaldson had him thrown off his property. (“In the West trespassing is a serious offense,” Donaldson explained.)

Had Donaldson as a journalist been pursuing a politician or even a corporate executive, he would have felt justified in using the most aggressive reportorial techniques. When these techniques were turned on him, he complained that the reporters were going too far. The analysts who are so clear-eyed about the conflict of interest in Newt Gingrich’s book deal claim that they see no reason, none at all, why their own finances might be of public interest.

Last May one of Donaldson’s colleagues on *This Week With David Brinkley*, George Will, wrote a column and delivered on-air comments ridiculing the Clinton Administration’s plan to impose tariffs on Japanese luxury cars, notably the Lexus. On the Brinkley show Will said that the tariffs would be “illegal” and would merely amount to “a subsidy for Mercedes dealerships.”

Neither in his column nor on the show did Will disclose that his wife, Mari Maseng Will, ran a firm that had been paid some \$200,000 as a registered foreign agent for the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association, and that one of the duties for which she was hired was to get American commentators to criticize the tariff plan. When Will was asked why he had never mentioned this, he replied that it was “just too silly” to think that his views might have been affected by his wife’s contract.

Will had, in fact, espoused such views for years, since long before his wife worked for the JAMA and even before he had married her. Few of his readers would leap to the conclusion that Will was serving as a mouthpiece for his

wife’s employers. But surely most would have preferred to learn that information from Will himself.

A third member of the regular Brinkley panel, Cokie Roberts, is, along with Will and Donaldson, a frequent and highly paid speaker before corporate audiences. She has made a point of not disclosing which interest groups she speaks to or how much money she is paid. She has criticized the Clinton Administration for its secretive handling of the controversy surrounding Hillary Clinton’s lucrative cattle-future trades and of the Whitewater affair, yet like the other pundits, she refuses to acknowledge that secrecy about financial interests undermines journalism’s credibility too.

OUT OF TOUCH WITH AMERICA

IN the week leading up to a State of the Union address White House aides always leak word to reporters that this year the speech will be “different.” No more laundry list of all the government’s activities, no more boring survey of every potential trouble spot in the world. This time, for a change, the speech is going to be short, punchy, and thematic. When the actual speech occurs, it is never short, punchy, or thematic. It is long and detailed, like all its predecessors, because as the deadline nears, every part of the government scrambles desperately to have a mention of its activities crammed into the speech somewhere.

In the days before Bill Clinton’s address a year ago aides said that no matter what had happened to all those other Presidents, this time the speech really would be short, punchy, and thematic. The President understood the situation, he recognized his altered role, and he saw this as an opportunity to set a new theme for his third and fourth years in office.

That evening the promises once again proved false. Bill Clinton gave a speech that was enormously long even by the standards of previous State of the Union addresses. The speech had three or four apparent endings, it had ad-libbed inserts, and it covered both the details of policy and the President’s theories about what had gone wrong with America. An hour and twenty-one minutes after he took the podium, the President stepped down.

Less than a minute later the mockery from commentators began. For instant analysis NBC went to Peggy Noonan, who had been a speechwriter for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush. She grimaced and barely tried to conceal her disdain for such an ungainly, sprawling speech. Other commentators soon mentioned that congressmen had been slipping out of the Capitol building before the end of the speech, that Clinton had once more failed to stick to an agenda, that the speech probably would not give the President the new start he sought. The comments were virtually all about the tactics of the speech, and they were almost all thumbs down.

A day and a half later the first newspaper columns showed

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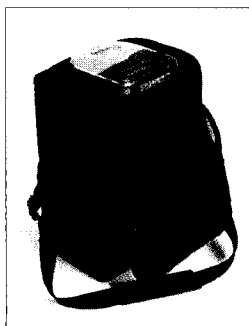
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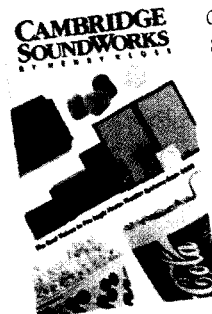
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up. They were even more critical. On January 26 *The Washington Post's* op-ed page consisted mainly of stories about the speech, all of which were withering. "ALL MUSH AND NO MESSAGE" was the headline on a column by Richard Cohen. "AN OPPORTUNITY MISSED" was the more statesmanlike judgment from David Broder. Cohen wrote: "Pardon me if I thought of an awful metaphor: Clinton at a buffet table, eating everything in sight."

What a big fat jerk that Clinton was! How little he understood the obligations of leadership! Yet the news section of the same day's *Post* had a long article based on discussions with a focus group of ordinary citizens in Chicago who had watched the President's speech. "For these voters, the State of the Union speech was an antidote to weeks of unrelenting criticism of Clinton's presidency," the article said.

"Tonight reminded us of what has been accomplished," said Maureen Prince, who works as the office manager in her husband's business and has raised five children. "We are so busy hearing the negatives all the time, from the time you wake up on your clock radio in the morning. . . ."

The group's immediate impressions mirrored the results of several polls conducted immediately after the president's speech.

ABC News found that eight out of 10 approved of the president's speech. CBS News said that 74 percent of those surveyed said they had a "clear idea" of what Clinton stands for, compared with just 41 percent before the speech. A Gallup Poll for *USA Today* and Cable News Network found that eight in 10 said Clinton is leading the country in the right direction.

Nielsen ratings reported in the same day's paper showed that the longer the speech went on, the larger the number of people who tuned in to watch.

The point is not that the pundits are necessarily wrong and the public necessarily right. The point is the gulf between the two groups' reactions. The very aspects of the speech that had seemed so ridiculous to the professional commentators—its detail, its inclusiveness, the hyperearnestness of Clinton's conclusion about the "common good"—seemed attractive and worthwhile to most viewers.

"I'm wondering what so much of the public heard that our highly trained expert analysts completely missed," Carol Cantor, a software consultant from California, wrote in a discussion on the WELL, a popular online forum, three days after the speech. What they heard was, in fact, the speech, which allowed them to draw their own conclusions rather than being forced to accept an expert "analysis" of how the President "handled" the speech. In most cases the analysis

goes unchallenged, because the public has no chance to see whatever event the pundits are describing. In this instance viewers had exactly the same evidence about Clinton's performance that the "experts" did, and from it they drew radically different conclusions.

In 1992 political professionals had laughed at Ross Perot's "boring" and "complex" charts about the federal budget deficit—until it became obvious that viewers loved them. And for a week or two after this State of the Union speech there were little jokes on the weekend talk shows about how out of step the pundit reaction had been with opinion "out there." But after a polite chuckle the talk shifted to how the President and the speaker and Senator Dole were handling their jobs.

TERM LIMITS

As soon as the Democrats were routed in the 1994 elections, commentators and TV analysts said it was obvious that the American people were tired of seeing the same old faces in Washington. The argument went that those who lived inside the Beltway had forgotten what it was like in the rest of the country. They didn't get it. They were out of touch. The only way to jerk the congressional system back to reality was to bring in new blood.

A few days after the new Congress was sworn in, CNN began running an updated series of promotional ads for its program *Crossfire*. (Previous ads had featured shots of locomotives colliding head-on and rams locking horns, to symbolize the meeting of minds on the show.) Everything has been shaken up in the capital, one of the ads began. New faces. New names. New people in charge of all the committees.

"In fact," the announcer said, in a tone meant to indicate whimsy, "only one committee hasn't changed. The *welcoming* committee."

The camera pulled back to reveal the three hosts of *Crossfire*—Pat Buchanan, John Sununu, and Michael Kinsley—standing with arms crossed on the steps of the Capitol building, blocking the path of the new arrivals trying to make their way in. "Watch your step," one of the hosts said.

Talk about not getting it! The people who put together this ad must have imagined that the popular irritation with inside-the-Beltway culture was confined to members of Congress—and didn't extend to members of the punditocracy, many of whom had held their positions much longer than the typical congressman had. The difference between the "welcoming committee" and the congressional committees headed by fallen Democratic titans like Tom Foley and

The people who did the *Crossfire* ad must have imagined that and didn't extend to members of the punditocracy, many of whom

Jack Brooks was that the congressmen can be booted out.

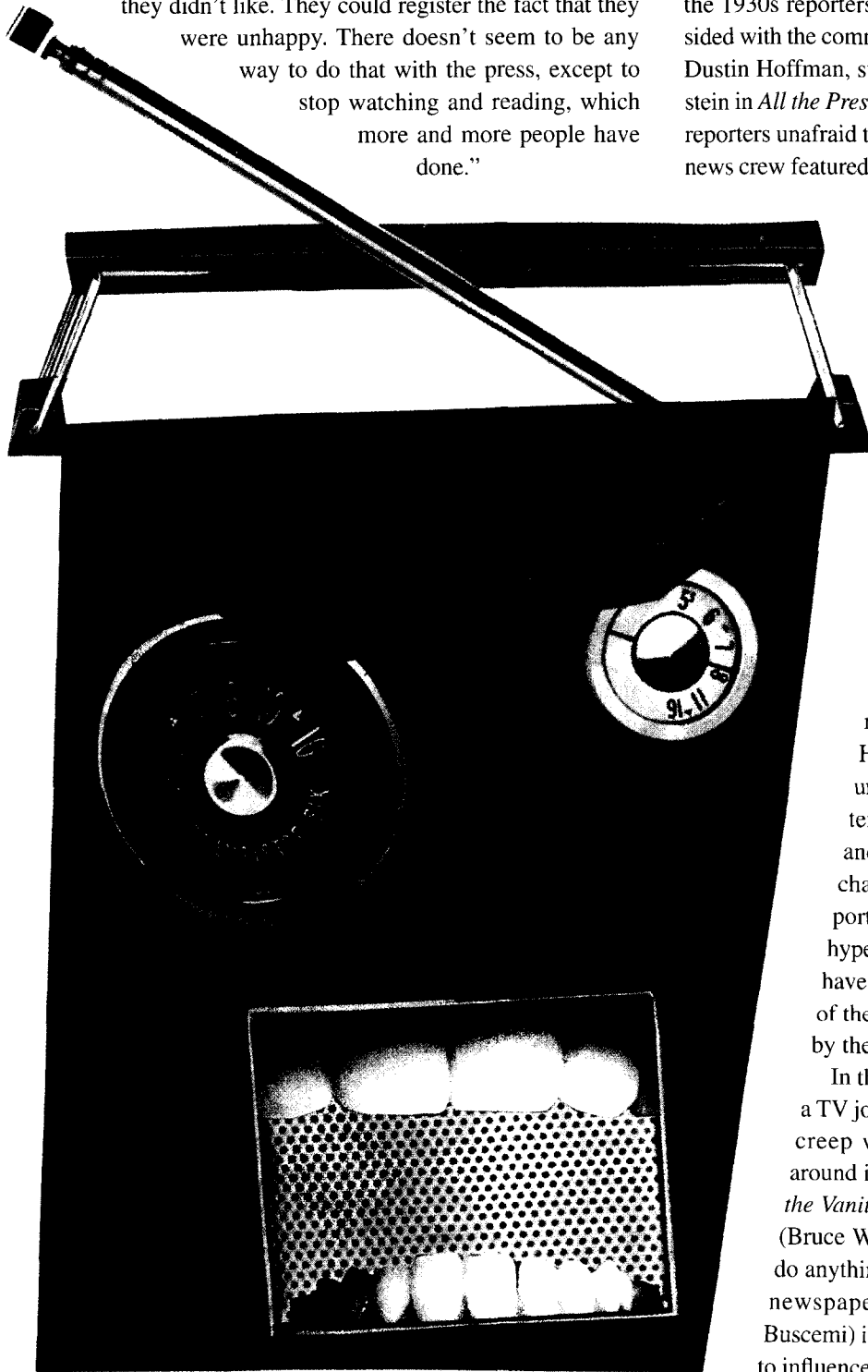
"Polls show that both Republicans and Democrats felt better about the Congress just after the 1994 elections," a Clinton Administration official said last year. "They had 'made the monkey jump'—they were able to discipline an institution they didn't like. They could register the fact that they were unhappy. There doesn't seem to be any way to do that with the press, except to stop watching and reading, which more and more people have done."

LOST CREDIBILITY

THERE is an astonishing gulf between the way journalists—especially the most prominent ones—think about their impact and the way the public does. In movies of the 1930s reporters were gritty characters who instinctively sided with the common man. In the 1970s Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman, starring as Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in *All the President's Men*, were better-paid but still gritty reporters unafraid to challenge big power. Even the local-TV-news crew featured on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* had a certain down-to-earth pluck. Ted Knight, as the pea-brained news anchor Ted Baxter, was a ridiculously pompous figure but not an arrogant one.

Since the early 1980s the journalists who have shown up in movies have often been portrayed as more loathsome than the lawyers, politicians, and business moguls who are the traditional bad guys in films about the white-collar world. In *Absence of Malice*, made in 1981, an ambitious newspaper reporter (Sally Field) ruins the reputation of a businessman (Paul Newman) by rashly publishing articles accusing him of murder. In *Broadcast News*, released in 1987, the anchorman (William Hurt) is still an airhead, like Ted Baxter, but unlike Ted, he works in a business that is systematically hostile to anything except profit and bland good looks. The only sympathetic characters in the movie, an overeducated reporter (Albert Brooks) and a hyperactive and hyperidealistic producer (Holly Hunter), would have triumphed as heroes in a newspaper movie of the 1930s. In this one they are ground down by the philistines at their network.

In the *Die Hard* series, which started in 1988, a TV journalist (William Atherton) is an unctuous creep who will lie and push helpless people around in order to get on the air. In *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990) the tabloid writer Peter Fallow (Bruce Willis) is a disheveled British sot who will do anything for a free drink. In *Rising Sun* (1993) a newspaper reporter known as "Weasel" (Steve Buscemi) is an out-and-out criminal, accepting bribes to influence his coverage. As Antonia Zerbisias point-



irritation with Washington was confined to members of Congress—had held their positions longer than the typical congressman had.

ed out in the *Toronto Star* in 1993, movies and TV shows offer almost no illustrations of journalists who are not full of themselves, shallow, and indifferent to the harm they do. During Operation Desert Storm, *Saturday Night Live* ridiculed American reporters who asked military spokesmen questions like “Can you tell us exactly when and where you are going to launch your attack?” “The journalists were portrayed as ignorant, arrogant and pointlessly adversarial,” Jay Rosen, of New York University, wrote about the episode. “By gently rebuffing their ludicrous questions, the Pentagon briefer [on *SNL*] came off as a model of sanity.”

Even real-life members of the Washington pundit corps have made their way into movies—Eleanor Clift, Morton Kondracke, hosts from *Crossfire*—in 1990s releases such as *Dave* and *Rising Sun*. Significantly, their role in the narrative is as buffoons. The joke in these movies is how rapidly the pundits leap to conclusions, how predictable their reactions are, how automatically they polarize the debate without any clear idea of what has really occurred. That real-life journalists are willing to keep appearing in such movies, knowing how they will be cast, says something about the source of self-respect in today’s media: celebrity, on whatever basis, matters more than being taken seriously.

Movies do not necessarily capture reality, but they suggest a public mood—in this case, a contrast between the apparent self-satisfaction of the media celebrities and the contempt in which they are held by the public. “The news media has a generally positive view of itself in the watchdog role,” wrote the authors of an exhaustive survey of public attitudes and the attitudes of journalists themselves toward the press. (The survey was conducted by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press, and was released last May.) But “the outside world strongly faults the news media for its negativism. . . . The public goes so far as to say that the press gets in the way of society solving its problems. . . .” According to the survey, “two out of three members of the public had nothing or nothing good to say about the media.”

The media establishment is beginning to get at least an inkling of this message. Through the past decade discussions among newspaper editors and publishers have been a litany of woes: fewer readers; lower “penetration” rates, as a decreasing share of the public pays attention to news; a more and more desperate search for ways to attract the public’s interest. In the short run these challenges to credibility are a problem for journalists and journalism. In the longer run they are a problem for democracy.

TURNING A CALLING INTO A SIDESHOW

EVEN if practiced perfectly, journalism will leave some resentment and bruised feelings in its wake. The justification that journalists can offer for the harm they inevitably inflict is to show, through their actions, their

understanding that what they do matters and that it should be done with care.

This is why the most depressing aspect of the new talking-pundit industry may be the argument made by many practitioners: the whole thing is just a game, which no one should take too seriously. Michael Kinsley, a highly respected and indisputably talented policy journalist, has written that his paid speaking engagements are usually mock debates, in which he takes the liberal side.

Since the audiences are generally composed of affluent businessmen, my role is like that of the team that gets to lose to the Harlem Globetrotters. But I do it because it pays well, because it’s fun to fly around the country and stay in hotels, and because even a politically unsympathetic audience can provide a cheap ego boost.

Last year Morton Kondracke, of *The McLaughlin Group*, told Mark Jurkowitz, of *The Boston Globe*, “This is not writing, this is not thought.” He was describing the talk-show activity to which he has devoted a major part of his time for fifteen years. “You should not take it a hundred percent seriously. Anybody who does is a fool.” Fred Barnes wrote that he was happy to appear in a mock *McLaughlin* segment on *Murphy Brown*, because “the line between news and fun barely exists anymore.”

The McLaughlin Group often takes its act on the road, gimmicks and all, for fees reported to be about \$20,000 per appearance. *Crossfire* goes for paid jaunts on the road. So do panelists from *The Capital Gang*. Contracts for such appearances contain a routine clause specifying that the performance may not be taped or broadcast. This provision allows speakers to recycle their material, especially those who stitch together anecdotes about “the mood in Washington today.” It also reassures the speakers that the sessions aren’t really serious. They won’t be held to account for what they say, so the normal standards don’t apply.

Yet the fact that no one takes the shows seriously is precisely what’s wrong with them, because they jeopardize the credibility of everything that journalists do. “I think one of the really destructive developments in Washington in the last fifteen years has been the rise in these reporter talk shows,” Tom Brokaw has said. “Reporters used to cover policy—not spend all of their time yelling at each other and making philistine judgments about what happened the week before. It’s not enlightening. It makes me cringe.”

When talk shows go on the road for performances in which hostility and disagreement are staged for entertainment value; when reporters pick up thousands of dollars appearing before interest groups and sharing tidbits of what they have heard; when all the participants then dash off for the next plane, caring about none of it except the money—when these things happen, they send a message. The message is: We don’t respect what we’re doing. Why should anyone else? ❧



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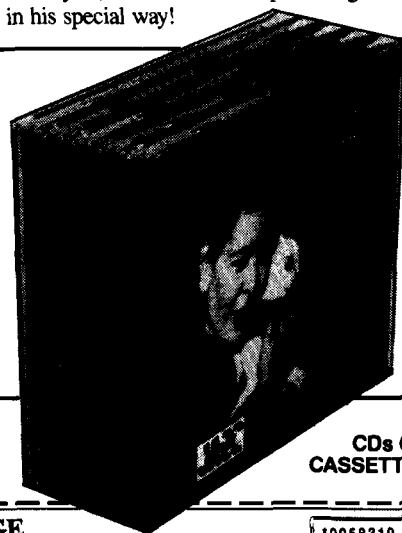
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Albert and the Animals

by MARSHA RABE

*Who can tell what a baby thinks?
Who can follow the gossamer links
By which the manikin feels its way
Out from the shores of the great unknown
Into the light of day?
What does he think of his mother's eyes?
What does he think of his mother's hair?
What of the cradle that flies and flies
Backward and forward through the air?*

—Anonymous

Highland, Wisconsin
Sunday, April 30, 1893

To the Sisters of Charity at the Foundling Hospital
175 East 68th Street
New York City

Dear Sisters,

I say at the outset that I do not want him. This is my daughter Margaret's idea, most entirely and emphatically hers. She learned of you and your good work from Father Thomas J. McCormick, at St. Michael's Church, in Mineral Point, Wisconsin. Father McCormick recently visited your establishment, and spoke about it to the parish youth group. Margaret, her father, and I discussed the acquisition of a child in a most cursory manner, and without our consent or encouragement—indeed, without even our knowledge—she proceeded to write the required letters, falsely, over her father's forged signature. It pains me greatly to admit that my daughter is capable of such duplicity, even when the ostensible cause is worthy and charitable. And yet, it is true.

And then, most unexpectedly, at dinner yesterday evening she announced that a young boy is coming to us from New

York City. Her tone and manner were so calm and unimpassioned that had I not paid heed, I might well have thought she had done no more than state her admiration for a new bonnet in Kaufmann's window on Main Street.

Do not think me hard of heart or uncaring, Sisters, but at fifty-three I am an old woman and not well. We are far from wealthy. The farm provides for our needs but allows no excess. Of my five living children, three are grown and gone. Patrick, the oldest, lives with us still, as does Margaret, the youngest, age thirteen. She is eager for this boy you are sending us. She says that she will tend to him and that I will

not even know he is here. But I have my doubts. My husband, when he spoke of it at all, pressed for an older boy, someone to help with the chores. When he understood that the one you selected for us is only four years of age, he lost whatever small curiosity he possessed in the matter. So I fear that the burden

of this child will fall heavily upon me, and frankly, good Sisters, I shall not shoulder it.

I spoke to Father McCormick today after High Mass. He urged me to write to you to withdraw Margaret's request for the child. That, as you must surmise, is the motive that prompts this letter. So if the boy has not yet left your admirable care, then keep him until a more willing and suitable



family stakes its claim to him. If, on the other hand, he has already departed, please let me know when he will arrive, so that I can make adequate preparations. Father McCormick explained that should this missive arrive after the boy has left, we can send him back to you at the end of summer. Or, if you prefer, we can dispatch him to another home, at no expense to us. Please confirm this for me. I assure you, Sisters, that should the boy be on his way, I will attempt to care for him to the utmost of my abilities. All things are worth trying, so I will try this child, but for the summer only. Do bear in mind the probability of his return, since at this moment I do not want him.

I eagerly await your reply.

Most sincerely,
Mrs. Thomas O'Brien (Constance)

The New York Foundling Hospital
New York City
May 7, 1893

My Dear Mrs. O'Brien,

Thank you for your letter dated April 30th. It is my great pleasure to tell you that I do so trust in your goodness and generosity that despite your understandable misgivings, the boy is coming to you soon. I myself will put him on the train in three days' time, Wednesday, May 10. We will travel by the noon ferry to Jersey City, where Albert Joseph—that is his name—will board the Pennsylvania Railroad No. 5 (*The Pennsylvania Limited*) at quarter past twelve. He will arrive in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at twenty minutes past two o'clock in the afternoon, and then at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at half past eleven that night. After a ten-minute stopover he will leave Pittsburgh and arrive in Fort Wayne, Indiana, at twenty minutes to eight o'clock on the morning of Thursday, May 11. He will then travel to Chicago, Illinois, where he will arrive at twelve o'clock noon on that same day. At that juncture he will transfer to the Illinois Central Railroad, leave Chicago at quarter past one P.M., and arrive in Freeport, Illinois, at five o'clock in the evening. His train will depart Freeport twenty minutes later and will arrive in Dodgeville, Wisconsin, at twenty minutes to eight P.M., still on Thursday, May 11. I am told that Dodgeville is eighteen miles from Highland, so please arrange to be there to meet his train.

The weather here is warm, so I will dress him lightly in a double-breasted wool jacket—which I believe will be useful to him in time to come (it now quite overwhelms him). He will also wear long cuffed trousers, a white cotton shirt, and good leather shoes. I do not know what the spring season will bring to Wisconsin, though I am told it is much like here, only colder.

He will have one change of clean underthings in a brown paper bag. In another bag he will have two sandwiches—

cheese on rye bread, his favorite—and various fruits. For your future information, Mrs. O'Brien, Albert refuses to eat meat. Perhaps you can break him of this strange and frustrating habit. I tried diligently but failed.

He will be accompanied on his journey by a Miss Clare Connelly, age eleven. I know Miss Connelly to be an outstandingly responsible and capable young girl, as she has been with us since birth. Do not worry, Mrs. O'Brien. She will care for Albert Joseph as would any young woman twice her age. She has helped frequently with infants, many much younger than Albert, who, at four, is himself more reasonable and clear-thinking than you could possibly imagine.

My only concern is that as Miss Connelly will have to leave the train at Chicago, Illinois, to begin her own new life with a family there, Albert may be left to travel alone from Chicago to Dodgeville. Miss Connelly will see that he transfers safely from the Pennsylvania Railroad to the Illinois Central Railroad, and I will instruct her to find someone on the latter train to care for Albert after her departure. Perhaps a conductor will attend to him. We must trust in God's Will in such matters and pray for the best.

I will also attach notes to Albert's person, for anyone curious enough to look. I will place these notes in his pockets. Further, I have sewn your name and the words "Highland Wisco" into the hem of his jacket sleeve at the right wrist. I used a sturdy white thread. I will label him as best I can. He knows his own name and yours and has been told to ask for you.

You will recognize him immediately, Mrs. O'Brien, for he is a beautiful, bright boy, with not the slightest penchant for naughtiness. I am confident that you, your husband, and your generous (if somewhat mischievous!) daughter Margaret will quickly come to love him, as I do, for he is no trouble and readily learns new tasks.

I will now describe his physical appearance to help you identify him at the railway station in Dodgeville. He has fine fair hair, very straight. His eyes are blue with a slight greenish cast. His features are even and delicate. Indeed, I consider his an almost angelic visage. Further, his teeth, legs, and back are straight and strong, and his lungs healthy. He speaks very little, but understands everything. He has a thoughtful, sober demeanor, and yet a quick and easy smile. He is not in the least bit childish, despite his four short years on this Earth. His religious development is most impressive, imbuing him with a touching and genuine piety. He knows several prayers, including The Hail Mary, The Our Father, The Glory Be, and certain lengthy sections of The Apostles' Creed. He stands thirty-seven inches and weighs thirty-five pounds. He is small for his age, a condition I attribute to his diet. I pray that the fresh air of Wisconsin will stimulate his appetite and correct what is his only peculiarity.

I close this letter with the fervent hope that I will hear good news from you soon. Please write to me with questions, observations, and information, for I love Albert Joseph. If, indeed, it is not unseemly for me to say so, I

love him as I would my own fleshly son, had God allowed it.

I pray that Jesus Christ, His saints—of whom, Mrs. O'Brien, I believe you are one—and His loving Blessed Virgin Mother, Mary, will grant you and your fine family all manner of grace, strength, and happiness.

In Christ, I am Yours,
Sister Jeanne-Marie Clotilde
New York Foundling Hospital

Highland, Wisconsin
May 13, 1893

Sister Jeanne-Marie Clotilde
The New York Foundling Hospital
175 East 68th Street
New York City

Dear Sister Jeanne-Marie Clotilde,

The boy arrived, as you said he would. We had no choice but to meet him, as you seemed indifferent to the misgivings and requests I expressed in my letter of April 30th. Forgive me for saying so, Sister, but by ignoring my words you did this child a grave disservice. As is the case with all children, this boy belongs in a home that welcomes him, not in one that feels duped into accepting him.

Further, you have done me an injustice. As stated in my previous letter, I am not a well woman. At the risk of embarrassing you, I will be blunt. Six months ago I lost my breasts to cancer and the surgeon's knife. With them went the last remnants of my maternal urge. Subsequently I have endured great agitation in my mind and spirit, and have often pondered the value of my place here on earth. Further, and much to my shame, I sought relief in hard drink and for a time imagined I was carrying a child, although I knew this was impossible. Thankfully, all that has passed, and my thoughts are now at peace with whatever God's Mercy holds in store for me.

I deeply resent, however, the responsibility you have thrust upon me to care for this poor boy. I have borne seven children to full term in my lifetime. Two of them died, one immediately from a misshapen head, and the other at the age of two, from diphtheria. I have done my duty to God and to my husband, Sister, and I do not believe I should be called upon to do even more, now, with the appearance of this child. Further, I worked as a teacher for six years before

marriage, thereby contributing to the good of many young children. And, finally, my disease is certain to return in the near future. I accept this fact as God's Will. When that day comes, however, what will become of this small, dependent child? My husband is not inclined to rear him, and Margaret will have to begin her own life unencumbered by the liabilities and responsibilities of a young brother for whom she must care.

Nevertheless, he is here, and as you wrote, he is a beautiful child. Thus I will be kind to this boy and will attempt to the best of my abilities to care for him this summer. But my heart, Sister, is not in it, and the heart, I believe, is crucial to the proper rearing of children.

Further, in these past two days he has shown evidence of being a troubling child, even taking into consideration the strain of his journey and the confusion and fright that his new surroundings must surely engender in his young imagination. For his entire first night under our roof he sat on the edge of his bed as still as ice. If he slept at all, he did so bolt upright. He would not allow us to remove his clothing and dress him for sleep, nor would he speak to us. The following

morning he ate but little, just milk and one fried egg, and throughout the day he did not stir, but sat staring out the window at the barn. To this day he has refused to change his clothing and has said nothing comprehensible.

At present I feel at sea in my exchanges with him, and worry that he

may possess some deficiency or lapse that can lead only to disaster. I must know more about this child. If you have any additional information, please send it to me promptly. I would like to know something of his parentage. And what is his birth date?

I await your speedy reply.

Sincerely yours,
Constance O'Brien

New York City
Sunday, May 21, 1893

Dear Mrs. O'Brien,

Two whole days were required that I might absorb the powerful effects of your most recent letter. I did not, of course, know of your illness, nor did I understand your sorrows. I truly beg your pardon, Mrs. O'Brien, and pray fervently for your health, in spirit, mind, and body.

In response I can state only that life in this city is desper-



ately cruel for children like Albert. The streets teem with unwanted boys and girls. Whole families die of diseases like typhoid, cholera, and influenza, leaving behind one or two small survivors to fend for themselves. These are castaways, adrift on the world's harsh and heartless sea. We struggle to find homes for these children—to bring them to the safe shore of God's eternal love—and in our eagerness we sometimes err. Still, my dear Mrs. O'Brien, if you could only see what a great service you have performed by taking Albert under your roof! You have given him what all children need—a family! And you have allowed us to take in yet another child, one who would have slept in doorways or on hay barges had you not accepted Albert into your home. Further, life in Wisconsin, with its clean water and sweet, stimulating air, will surely benefit Albert immeasurably more than life in this city of pestilence and pain.

To answer your questions, we know little of Albert's parental history. He came to us in a basket left at our back door during the early-morning hours of Sunday, September 11, 1888. He was fully clothed and seemingly well tended. A five-dollar bill and a handwritten note accompanied him. I have the note in front of me and will copy it here, exactly as written:

Dear Sisters,

Please take care of my baby boy. I love him but can not feed and cloth him. He is not illegal. His name is Albert Joseph and he was Baptized by an Irish preest. He is now four months of age.

*Thank you Sisters and God bless You All,
the Sad Mother of Albert*

Based on this information, we dated his birth at approximately May 11, 1888, which would mean that he arrived at your home on his fifth birthday, exactly. Believe me, Mrs. O'Brien, I did not plan this. It is the sheerest of fate's coincidences, and I realize it only now, as I write it to you. And yet if seen from our Savior's Point of View, it may not be coincidence at all but a fine thread in the Tapestry of His Father's Wondrous Plan.

I have been especially close to Albert, for I arrived at the Foundling Hospital from our Mother House in Quebec, Canada, on September 1, 1888, just ten days before he arrived. I nursed him through two serious illnesses, including scarlet fever. During our time together I taught him several French words, which he now uses with a child's disarming and often apt carelessness. For example, Albert and I traveled by livery to the ferry in Jersey City on the day of his recent departure. He was elated to begin his new life in Highland, Wisconsin, and, as is typical of him, he felt a great affinity for the horse that drew our carriage. He pointed to the horse's ears and called them "piquant," a word I recently taught him. I thought it a fine application of a difficult word.

(Oh, Mrs. O'Brien: I was most heartened to learn that you were once a teacher. After entering the convent I, too, was trained to teach, and found the shaping of young minds the most gratifying of all the work God has asked of me.)

I hope this information will be of some assistance to you. I acknowledge its inadequacy, but it is all I have. I eagerly await your next correspondence. Does Albert continue to refuse to consume meat? And has he ever asked after me?

I will remember you in my prayers.

Most sincerely yours in Christ our Savior,
Sister Jeanne-Marie

Highland, Wisconsin
June 9, 1893

Sister Jeanne-Marie Clotilde
The New York Foundling Hospital
175 East 68th Street
New York City

Dear Sister Jeanne-Marie,

Much has transpired in the nearly two weeks since I opened your last letter. I have found it puzzling and difficult knowing so little about this boy and yet feeling such responsibility for his well-being. With my children I could always draw a line from their actions to those of other persons in our family. When Liam began to stutter, I remembered that my uncle Homer was similarly afflicted. When Timothy developed a limp, I recalled that my mother's second cousin, Walter, was likewise crippled. And when Patrick began to show signs of feeble-mindedness, I remembered that my father's uncle Aaron spent the last nine years of his life at the Wisconsin State Hospital for the Insane. But with Albert everything is unprecedented and inexplicable.

As one example, Sister, can you tell me: Was Albert ever prone to theft? In the past several days he has acted in a way that is quite unsettling to all of us. It began after Mass on Sunday, May 21. We returned from church, hungry from fasting, and I began to prepare our breakfast. I sent Patrick to the henhouse to fetch some eggs. He returned empty-handed. Believing he had misunderstood, I sent him back. Again he returned without a single egg. So I went to the henhouse myself and, much to my astonishment, found not one egg, which is most strange, as our hens are fertile and reliable. My husband was as abashed as I. Later that day, as I was putting clean clothes into drawers, I made a most astonishing discovery. There, nestled in each of our drawers, was a cluster of chicken eggs, tucked in the corner and covered lightly with our clothing. Still later I discovered the hogs' feed in the horses' stalls, and the horses' oats in the henhouse.

When I asked Albert if he knew anything about this strange confusion, he quickly admitted to all of it. He said he

was “putting things at home” (his exact words), and claimed that the animals should share their food. Other occurrences have continued this theme. I found my hairbrush in the hayloft, for example, and my husband’s favorite hat in the hogs’ trough.

Still other objects remain missing: my best linen handkerchief, for one; Patrick’s dress collar and cloth umbrella; and my husband’s Missal. Albert makes no attempt to deny responsibility, and my husband believes that corporal punishment is the only means of breaking such potentially illegal habits. So now, each time an object disappears, Thomas gets out his belt and strikes Albert several times across the behind.

I myself do not agree with such methods, but my husband is a strong man, having marched to the sea with General William T. Sherman’s Union Army some thirty years ago. Although I did not know him then, I believe his participation in the burning of Atlanta, Georgia, and the rude destruction of property and livestock along the way hardened his heart and stilled the gentler aspects of his nature.

And yet another strange occurrence requires your clarification. Yesterday morning my husband and I were in the barn feeding the horses. Albert had accompanied us, as he seems to take particular delight in watching the animals eat. At some point in the conversation occurring between us, my husband commented on our prize horse, Sassy, calling her a “grand mare.” With that Albert began to laugh uncontrollably and insisted that Sassy was not a grand mare, but that I was. He repeated this sentiment with great conviction, point-

ing at me and insisting that I was a grand mare. As he speaks rarely, this outburst was so out of character as to be shocking. I cannot understand the import of this puzzling incident, and I wonder about Albert’s mental stability if he could, as he did, maintain in the face of all logic and common sense that I was a horse.

In response to your questions, Albert is adamant in his refusal to eat meat. His stubbornness is annoying, and I am fearful that his growth will be stunted permanently. Further, he grew quite beside himself recently when he witnessed my husband killing a chicken for supper. The chicken ran around the yard for some few moments after its head was removed, as is natural for chickens. Albert, however, screaming piteously, grabbed the decapitated head from off the tree stump and scurried after the chicken like a banshee, begging the dead animal to stop so that he could “fix” it. The event was so unexpected that all we could do was laugh. Later that night I watched Albert sneak out to the rabbit hutch, open the door, lift one of the rabbits to the ground, and stomp his feet, as if to frighten the rabbit away. The rabbit, however, accustomed to people, simply stood there until I arrived and put it back into the hutch. My husband and I feel Albert’s behavior is unnatural. We will try to correct it.

Albert asks for you frequently and I explain that you are far away. Please write soon with any comments or observations that will help us better understand Albert’s unique personality.

Waiting eagerly,
Constance O’Brien

THE BODY MUTINIES

When the doctor runs out of words and still
I won’t leave, he latches my shoulder and
steers me out doors. Where I see his blurred hand,
through the milk glass, flapping good-bye like a sail
(& me not griefstruck yet but still amazed: how
words and names—medicine’s blunt instruments—
undid me. And the seconds, the half seconds,
it took for him to say those words). For now,
I’ll just stand in the courtyard watching bodies
struggle in then out of one lean shadow
a tall fir lays across the wet flagstones.
Before the sun clears the valance of gray trees
and finds the surgical-supply-shop window
and makes the dusty bedpans glint like coins.

—LUCIA PERILLO

New York City
June 16, 1893

My Dear Constance,

Your most interesting letter of June 9th is received. May the Lord reward you a thousandfold for the kindness and patience you are showing dear Albert. Your letters are of great value to me, as I feel that despite the many miles that separate us, Albert still holds a part of my being in his. I am glad that he asks for me, but am sure that in your loving care he will soon forget me.

Unfortunately, I cannot solve all the mysteries you pose in your letter. For one, Albert never revealed any tendency toward theft while in my care, and I cannot begin to explain his behavior regarding the eggs & feed, etc. We do teach the children to share their meager belongings with others here at the Hospital, and Albert was always quick to do so. Perhaps he is simply mistaking that lesson and applying it to the animals on your farm.

Upon the incident concerning your horse I am happy to shed some light. I believe that Albert simply misunderstood what your husband was saying when he referred to

the horse as a grand mare and heard, instead, the French word *grand-mère*, which means “grandmother.” I am certain that he meant this as a compliment to you, as we teach our children to honor and respect all aspects of family, even though few of these unfortunate outcasts will ever be part of one.

I hesitate to say so, and I hope you will pardon what might be construed as impudent, but I do hope you can persuade your good husband to desist from corporal punishment. During my many years of working with children like Albert, I have found that physical punishment rarely corrects undesirable behavior, especially if the child has not yet reached the age of reason. I have read that the mind is connected to the brain, and that the brain responds to physical sensation in surprising ways. Pain teaches children not respect but fear, and fear leads to numbness of mind, not to acuity, thereby rendering the mind incapable of grasping the lesson being taught. Human nature seeks to escape pain and to find pleasure. My belief, then, is that when physical pain is used as a means of instruction, with each blow of the belt—with each second that the child suffers—we lose the child’s mind to the haphazard pleasures of the imagination. The child learns the art of fancy and fantasy, not the hard lesson of obedience, for the body is the most sordid and least reliable avenue to the soul. The body controls the lower functions only, and the boy who attempts to be good through fear is just as crude as the person who attempts to dance by rote.

My poor father, like your husband, was misguided in this regard, and thus I can assure you from my own hurtful personal experience that physical punishment leads not to comprehension but rather to a befuddled and nervous disposition. Indeed, when I entered the convent, at age eleven, I did so not only to answer Christ’s Call and to alleviate the burden on my desperately poor family but also because physical punishment had led me to the grotesque delusion that I was Saint Joan of Arc, destined for martyrdom and glory. Thanks to the kindness of the good Sisters of Charity, I slowly returned to my true self, and in that journey learned that those who are temperate act not from fear but from habit, and that good habits are created gradually, diligently, and lovingly. I believe with Saint Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians, “Charity suffereth long, and is kind.” I cannot think of a higher ideal than that, nor a more efficient means to touch a young boy’s heart and alter the disorderly habits of his mind.

Please forgive my remarks if you find them meddlesome.

Yours in Christ and all His Mercies,
Sister Jeanne-Marie

Postscript: Seeing that Albert is of such a sensitive nature, perhaps you can protect him from the natural slaughter of animals that is a good and necessary part of life on your farm.

New York City
June 29, 1893

My Dear Friend,

I have not heard from you in so many days that I fear I may have offended you. Please write soon to let me know that all is well with you and Albert and your good family. I never intended insult and dearly apologize if any was taken.

Your Friend in Christ,
Sister Jeanne-Marie

Highland, Wisconsin
July 8, 1893

Sister Jeanne-Marie Clotilde
The New York Foundling Hospital
175 East 68th Street
New York City

Dear Sister Jeanne-Marie,

I am sorry if my silence caused you worry. We have suffered a trying few weeks, and I simply could not find time to put pen to paper. Our cares seem most weighty this summer. First, Highland is in tumult, having been invaded by tramps whose brazenness and brutality quickly dispel whatever grain of pity one might feel for them. They number in the scores and seem to multiply daily, often congregating in front of taverns and other places of questionable reputation. Countless burglaries have been attributed to them, along with wanton destruction of property. We, thank God, have been spared, but Sam Peterson, an acquaintance, recently suffered a dreadful loss. Tramps lured his favorite hunting dog, a fine beagle named Lucius, into a shack, where they skinned and gutted him, as one would dress a deer. They placed the remains, hide intact, at Mr. Peterson’s door, with a note saying “We Mean Business.” Mrs. Peterson is said to have rebuffed their demands for food and drink the previous day.

I’ve heard that many of these men are Germans who worked at the iron mines. When the ore gave out some years ago, they moved to timbering. Now the trees are gone, and they have no means of making a livelihood. So they wander from town to town, stealing and begging. Further, three banks have closed during the past several months, leaving many farmers penniless. Some have turned to acts of arson to collect insurance on barns and livestock. And I understand that an outbreak of black diphtheria has taken fifteen lives, mainly children, in the town of Mount Horeb, just east of here. I also heard that two women—wives deserted by the tramps in Germantown—were driven mad by want and desperation and so took their own lives. They were found next to each other, hanging from the same tree, and a dead infant girl was discovered in a soapbox under their feet.

These tragedies reduce our troubles to almost nothing, and yet I cannot say that this summer is easy for us. Margaret has moved to Prairie du Chien, where she works in the kitchen of a prosperous family. Her absence has meant more work for me. Then our hogs developed a blight, and twelve had to be killed for no profit. And the very next week Albert and Patrick did something quite remarkable. According to Patrick, Albert told him to dig a large hole behind the barn to give the horses air. Those are Albert's words exactly, as he admits to having spoken them. Patrick complied, digging a pit some ten feet wide and two feet deep. As this was on the south side of the barn, where we seldom have cause to go, we did not discover the pit until it had been completed. My husband worked hard for two days to fill the hole again, even with Patrick's help.



Naturally, both Patrick and Albert were punished for this nonsense, which brings to mind the comments in your letter of June 16th regarding corporal punishment. My husband and I discussed these ideas and concluded that our experience in family matters justifies whatever course of discipline we might pursue for Albert. Be assured, however, that any and all punishment is administered with the correct intent. Indeed, we thought that Albert was responding in kind, until the incident described above.

Still, he is now more talkative and curious than ever. He has also gained weight and grown noticeably and begun to take part in family activities, like saying Grace before meals. He still refuses to eat meat, but we have accepted this in him. His objection to meat does not appear to be a whim or an act of contrariness on his part, but rather a manifestation of something deep in his unfathomable character. I hope, however, that he will outgrow it. He now tends to several of the animals on the farm, most often the cows. But we do not allow him to witness the slaughtering.

He seems content here, and I have come to appreciate even his eccentricities, and feel healthier now than I have since before my illness. Perhaps the doctors are wrong and the cancer will not return, and I will live to see Albert grown and happy.

Your friend in Wisconsin,
Constance (O'Brien)

New York City
July 16, 1893

Dear Constance,

It is Sunday night and the children are asleep. They sleep on cots lined up like soldiers, one close upon the other, in a large

room on the fourth floor of our Hospital. These are young children, infants to age five, so they are mixed, boys and girls together. The night beyond the windows is hot and quiet. I sit at a desk near the door, keeping watch. I write by candlelight. The children often speak in their sleep, like saints speaking in tongues. One child just spoke of a crocodile. Another talks about her dolly being lame. Two children whisper to each other, although both appear to be sleeping soundly. And Martin just wet the bed again. He is beginning to squirm in a miser-

able attempt to make himself comfortable. I will tend to him in a moment.

The bed immediately to my right is Albert's. Another child, a two-year-old Negro girl named Pearl, sleeps there now. I should never have allowed myself to love Albert as much as I did. I know that now. The other Sisters warned me,

but I was arrogant and ignored them. I recognize this now as a sin of pride, and I confess it to you, Constance, rather than to a priest, for no priest could know how serious a sin it really is. No absolution, no Act of Contrition, will ever put it to rest.

I knew Albert better than I have known any other male being on this Earth. I took his head in my hands and felt its weight and shape. I bathed his small body and dressed him. I cut his hair. I kissed him. I have many children here, and still none. I am seized by melancholy, for I sense a change in your most recent letter, and I realize that Albert's life is becoming yours, as it once was mine.

I must tend to Martin now, before his restlessness awakens the others.

May You Sleep in Christ's Loving Arms Always,
Sister Jean-Marie Clotilde

Highland, Wisconsin
August 14, 1893

Sister Jeanne-Marie Clotilde
The New York Foundling Hospital
175 East 68th Street
New York City

Dear Sister,

You will be relieved to learn that we have decided to keep the boy after all. We have changed his name to Robert Homer. We think it suits him better, and he does not seem to mind. I will always pray for you.

Yours,
Constance O'Brien

THE INSUFFICIENCY OF HONESTY

by STEPHEN L. CARTER

A COUPLE of years ago I began a university commencement address by telling the audience that I was going to talk about integrity. The crowd broke into applause. Applause! Just because they had heard the word “integrity”: that’s how starved for it they were. They had no idea how I was using the word, or what I was going to say about integrity, or, indeed, whether I was for it or against it. But they knew they liked the idea of talking about it.

Very well, let us consider this word “integrity.” Integrity is like the weather: everybody talks about it but nobody knows what to do about it. Integrity is that stuff that we always want more of. Some say that we need to return to the good old days when we had a lot more of it. Others say that we as a nation have never really had enough of it. Hardly anybody stops to explain exactly what we mean by it, or how we know it is a good thing, or why everybody needs to have the same amount of it. Indeed, the only trouble with integrity is that everybody who uses the word seems to mean something slightly different.

For instance, when I refer to integrity, do I mean simply “honesty”? The answer is no; although honesty is a virtue of importance, it is a different virtue from integrity. Let us, for simplicity, think of honesty as not lying; and let us further accept Sissela Bok’s definition of a lie: “any intentionally deceptive message which is *stated*.” Plainly, one cannot have integrity without being honest (although, as we shall see, the matter gets complicated), but one can certainly be honest and yet have little integrity.

When I refer to integrity, I have something very specific in mind. Integrity, as I will use the term, requires three steps: discerning what is right and what is wrong; acting on what you have discerned, even at personal cost; and saying openly that you are acting on your understanding of right and wrong. The first criterion captures the idea that integrity re-

quires a degree of moral reflectiveness. The second brings in the ideal of a person of integrity as steadfast, a quality that includes keeping one’s commitments. The third reminds us that a person of integrity can be trusted.

The first point to understand about the difference between honesty and integrity is that a person may be entirely honest without ever engaging in the hard work of discernment that integrity requires: she may tell us quite truthfully what she believes without ever taking the time to figure out whether what she believes is good and right and true. The problem

may be as simple as someone’s foolishly saying something that hurts a friend’s feelings; a few moments of thought would have revealed the likelihood of the hurt and the lack of necessity for

the comment. Or the problem may be more complex, as when a man who was raised from birth in a society that preaches racism states his belief in one race’s inferiority as a fact, without ever really considering that perhaps this deeply held view is wrong. Certainly the racist is being honest—he is telling us what he actually thinks—but his honesty does not add up to integrity.

TELLING EVERYTHING YOU KNOW

A WONDERFUL epigram sometimes attributed to the filmmaker Sam Goldwyn goes like this: “The most important thing in acting is honesty; once you learn to fake that, you’re in.” The point is that honesty can be something one *seems* to have. Without integrity, what passes for honesty often is nothing of the kind; it is fake honesty—or it is honest but irrelevant and perhaps even immoral.

Consider an example. A man who has been married for fifty years confesses to his wife on his deathbed that he was unfaithful thirty-five years earlier. The dishonesty was

*Honesty is not synonymous
with integrity—and integrity is
what we need*

killing his spirit, he says. Now he has cleared his conscience and is able to die in peace.

The husband has been honest—sort of. He has certainly unburdened himself. And he has probably made his wife (soon to be his widow) quite miserable in the process, because even if she forgives him, she will not be able to remember him with quite the vivid image of love and loyalty that she had hoped for. Arranging his own emotional affairs to ease his transition to death, he has shifted to his wife the burden of confusion and pain, perhaps for the rest of her life. Moreover, he has attempted his honesty at the one time in his life when it carries no risk; acting in accordance with what you think is right and risking no loss in the process is a rather thin and unadmirable form of honesty.

Besides, even though the husband has been honest in a sense, he has now twice been unfaithful to his wife: once thirty-five years ago, when he had his affair, and again when, nearing death, he decided that his own peace of mind was more important than hers. In trying to be honest he has violated his marriage vow by acting toward his wife not with love but with naked and perhaps even cruel self-interest.

As my mother used to say, you don't have to tell people everything you know. Lying and non-disclosure, as the law often recognizes, are not the same thing. Sometimes it is actually illegal to tell what you know, as, for example, in the disclosure of certain financial information by market insiders. Or it may be unethical, as when a lawyer reveals a confidence entrusted to her by a client. It may be simple bad manners, as in the case of a gratuitous comment to a colleague on his or her attire. And it may be subject to religious punishment, as when a Roman Catholic priest breaks the seal of the confessional—an offense that carries automatic excommunication.

In all the cases just mentioned, the problem with telling everything you know is that somebody else is harmed. Harm may not be the intention, but it is certainly the effect. Hon-



esty is most laudable when we risk harm to ourselves; it becomes a good deal less so if we instead risk harm to others when there is no gain to anyone other than ourselves. Integrity may counsel keeping our secrets in order to spare the feelings of others. Sometimes, as in the example of the wayward husband, the reason we want to tell what we know is precisely to shift our pain onto somebody else—a course of action dictated less by integrity than by self-interest. Fortunately, integrity and self-interest often coincide, as when a politician of integrity is rewarded with our votes. But often they do not, and it is at those moments that our integrity is truly tested.

ERROR

ANOTHER reason that honesty alone is no substitute for integrity is that if forthrightness is not preceded by discernment, it may result in the expression of an incorrect moral judgment. In other words, I may be honest about what I believe, but if I have never tested my beliefs, I may be wrong. And here I mean “wrong” in a particular sense: the proposition in question is wrong if I would change my mind about it after hard moral reflection.

Consider this example. Having been taught all his life that women are not as smart as men, a manager gives the women on his staff less-challenging assignments than he gives the men. He does this, he believes, for their own benefit: he does not want them to fail, and he believes that they will if he gives them tougher assignments. Moreover, when one of the women on his staff does poor work, he does not berate her as harshly as he would a man, because he expects nothing more. And he claims to be acting with integrity because he is acting according to his own deepest beliefs.

The manager fails the most basic test of integrity. The question is not whether his actions are consistent with what he most deeply believes but whether he has done the hard

work of discerning whether what he most deeply believes is right. The manager has not taken this harder step.

Moreover, even within the universe that the manager has constructed for himself, he is not acting with integrity. Although he is obviously wrong to think that the women on his staff are not as good as the men, even were he right, that would not justify applying different standards to their work. By so doing he betrays both his obligation to the institution that employs him and his duty as a manager to evaluate his employees.

The problem that the manager faces is an enormous one in our practical politics, where having the dialogue that makes democracy work can seem impossible because of our tendency to cling to our views even when we have not examined them. As Jean Bethke Elshtain has said, borrowing from John Courtney Murray, our politics are so fractured and contentious that we often cannot even reach *disagreement*. Our refusal to look closely at our own most cherished principles is surely a large part of the reason. Socrates thought the unexamined life not worth living. But the unhappy truth is that few of us actually have the time for constant reflection on our views—on public or private morality. Examine them we must, however, or we will never know whether we might be wrong.

None of this should be taken to mean that integrity as I have described it presupposes a single correct truth. If, for example, your integrity-guided search tells you that affirmative action is wrong, and my integrity-guided search tells me that affirmative action is right, we need not conclude that one of us lacks integrity. As it happens, I believe—both as a Christian and as a secular citizen who struggles toward moral understanding—that we *can* find true and sound answers to our moral questions. But I do not pretend to have found very many of them, nor is an exposition of them my purpose here.

It is the case not that there aren't any right answers but that, given human fallibility, we need to be careful in assuming that we have found them. However, today's political talk about how it is wrong for the government to impose one person's morality on somebody else is just mindless chatter. *Every* law imposes one person's morality on somebody else, because law has only two functions: to tell people to do what they would rather not or to forbid them to do what they would.

And if the surveys can be believed, there is far more moral agreement in America than we sometimes allow ourselves to think. One of the reasons that character education for young people makes so much sense to so many people is precisely that there seems to be a core set of moral understandings—we might call them the American Core—that most of us accept. Some of the virtues in this American Core are, one hopes, relatively noncontroversial. About 500 American communities have signed on to Michael Josephson's program to emphasize the "six pillars" of good charac-

ter: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, caring, fairness, and citizenship. These virtues might lead to a similarly non-controversial set of political values: having an honest regard for ourselves and others, protecting freedom of thought and religious belief, and refusing to steal or murder.

HONESTY AND COMPETING RESPONSIBILITIES

A FURTHER problem with too great an exaltation of honesty is that it may allow us to escape responsibilities that morality bids us bear. If honesty is substituted for integrity, one might think that if I say I am not planning to fulfill a duty, I need not fulfill it. But it would be a peculiar morality indeed that granted us the right to avoid our moral responsibilities simply by stating our intention to ignore them. Integrity does not permit such an easy escape.

Consider an example. Before engaging in sex with a woman, her lover tells her that if she gets pregnant, it is her problem, not his. She says that she understands. In due course she does wind up pregnant. If we believe, as I hope we do, that the man would ordinarily have a moral responsibility toward both the child he will have helped to bring into the world and the child's mother, then his honest statement of what he intends does not spare him that responsibility.

This vision of responsibility assumes that not all moral obligations stem from consent or from a stated intention. The linking of obligations to promises is a rather modern and perhaps uniquely Western way of looking at life, and perhaps a luxury that only the well-to-do can afford. As Fred and Shulamit Korn (a philosopher and an anthropologist) have pointed out, "If one looks at ethnographic accounts of other societies, one finds that, while obligations everywhere play a crucial role in social life, promising is not preeminent among the sources of obligation and is not even mentioned by most anthropologists." The Korns have made a study of Tonga, where promises are virtually unknown but the social order is remarkably stable. If life without any promises seems extreme, we Americans sometimes go too far the other way, parsing not only our contracts but even our marriage vows in order to discover the absolute minimum obligation that we have to others as a result of our promises.

That some societies in the world have worked out evidently functional structures of obligation without the need for promise or consent does not tell us what *we* should do. But it serves as a reminder of the basic proposition that our existence in civil society creates a set of mutual responsibilities that philosophers used to capture in the fiction of the social contract. Nowadays, here in America, people seem to spend their time thinking of even cleverer ways to avoid their obligations, instead of doing what integrity commands and fulfilling them. And all too often honesty is their excuse. ☞



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Child Labor in Pakistan

by JONATHAN SILVERS



Pakistan has recently passed laws greatly limiting child labor and indentured servitude—but those laws are universally ignored, and some 11 million children, aged four to fourteen, keep that country's factories operating, often working in brutal and squalid conditions

NO two negotiations for the sale of a child are alike, but all are founded on the pretense that the parties involved have the best interests of the child at heart. On this sweltering morning in the Punjab village of Wasan Pura a carpet master, Sadique, is describing for a thirty-year-old brick worker named Mirza the advantages his son will enjoy as an apprentice weaver. "I've admired your boy for several months," Sadique says. "Nadeem is bright and ambitious.

He will learn far more practical skills in six months at the loom than he would in six years of school. He will be taught by experienced craftsmen, and his pay will rise as his skills improve. Have no doubt, your son will be thankful for the opportunity you have given him, and the Lord will bless you for looking so well after your own."

Sadique has given this speech before. Like many manufacturers, he recruits children for his workshop almost con-

stantly, and is particularly aggressive in courting boys aged seven to ten. "They make ideal employees," he says. "Boys at this stage of development are at the peak of their dexterity and endurance, and they're wonderfully obedient—they'd work around the clock if I asked them." But when pressed he admits, "I hire them first and foremost because they're economical. For what I'd pay one second-class adult weaver I can get three boys, sometimes four, who can produce first-class rugs in no time."

The low cost of child labor gives Sadique and his fellow manufacturers a significant advantage in the Western marketplace, where they undersell their competitors from countries prohibiting child labor, often by improbable amounts. Not surprisingly, American and European consumers are attracted to low-price, high-quality products, and imports of child-made carpets from Pakistan have trebled in the past two decades. Pakistan's carpet makers have satisfied this surging demand by expanding production at existing factories and opening new ones wherever they can. To maximize their returns, virtually all these factories employ children, and an increasing number do so exclusively. Somewhere between 500,000 and one million Pakistani children aged four to fourteen now work as full-time carpet weavers. UNICEF believes that they make up 90 percent of the carpet makers' work force.

Sadique delivers his speech at volume and accompanies it with an assortment of gestures—nods, waves, raised eyebrows—that are as theatrical as they are out of place in his shambles of a workshop. He concludes with a smile and, just in case Mirza does not appreciate his generosity, adds a wistful coda: "I wish my father had given me such an opportunity." Mirza seems doubtful, perhaps because his son is seven years old, perhaps because he

has seen too many of his neighbors' children suffer through similar opportunities. But he returns Sadique's smile and says in a faint voice that he hopes Nadeem will learn enough to work one day as a journeyman weaver or, better still, to open a workshop of his own.

Whatever misgivings Mirza has at the moment are overshadowed by his poverty, which is extreme and worsening. He supports a family of five by working at a nearby kiln, molding bricks by hand for up to eighty hours a week. The work

wife concluded that the only way to avoid eviction was to bond their eldest child to one of the district's manufacturers. Sadique was their first choice: he was prosperous, his workshop was near their home, and he was rumored to have an urgent need for child laborers, which they believed would translate into a high price for Nadeem.

They were half right. The workshop has a perpetual need for children, but Sadique is unwilling to pay a premium for them. For that matter, he is unwilling

EACH YEAR MILLIONS
OF CHILDREN IN PAKISTAN
ENTER THE LABOR FORCE,
WHERE THEY COMPETE
WITH ADULTS—OFTEN
EVEN WITH THEIR PARENTS
—FOR WHAT LITTLE
WORK IS AVAILABLE. AT
LEAST HALF THESE
CHILDREN ARE UNDER
THE AGE OF TEN.

*Previous page, a brickyard in
Lahore; right, stitching soccer
balls in a factory in Sialkot*



pays poorly at the best of times, and on occasion it does not pay at all. Three weeks earlier a monsoon destroyed several thousand unfired bricks that had been left drying on factory grounds. The kiln owner held the workers accountable for the damage and refused to pay them for the two weeks they had spent making the bricks. The "fine," as the owner called it, proved ruinous. Already months behind on their rent and in debt to the village merchants, Mirza and his

to pay market rates. Having dispensed with the niceties, he offers Mirza 5,000 rupees (\$146) for five years of his son's labor. It's a paltry sum—roughly two months' earnings for an adult weaver. Mirza was expecting an offer at least three times as high. "Business is off this year," Sadique says, by way of preempting Mirza's objections. "When things improve, I may be able to give you another two or three hundred. Many fathers would be glad to get half this amount."

Mirza is distressed. He is a small man, stooped and wasted from his years at the kiln, his skin and tunic flecked with soot. Like most laborers, he is acutely aware of his caste, and in the presence of those whom he deems his betters is deferential to the point of abjectness. Bravely he asks Sadique for another thousand rupees, though he couches the request in the most self-deprecating terms he knows. "Sir, my family's survival depends on your charity. You will always be remembered in

charged for their children's food and tools, the raw materials they use, the errors they make, the amount of time the master spends "educating" them. Throughout Pakistan parents consider themselves fortunate if at the end of their child's service the master has paid them one third of the *peshgi*.

Mirza is unaware of these deductions and, eager to make his escape, does not ask questions that might complicate the proceedings. He consummates the deal by shaking Sadique's hand (after wiping

does not, we will all be disappointed, him most of all." Mirza thanks the master for his kindness, bows low, and runs off to relay this information to his son.

An Inexhaustible Labor Pool

CHILD labor has assumed epidemic proportions in Pakistan. Statistics are unreliable, but the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) last year estimated the number of Pakistani working children to be "realistically in the region of 11–12 million." At least half these children are under the age of ten. Despite a recent series of laws prohibiting child labor and indentured servitude, children make up a quarter of the unskilled work force, and can be found in virtually every factory, every workshop, every field. They earn on average a third of the adult wage. Certain industries, notably carpet making and brick making, cannot survive without them. One World Bank economist maintains that Pakistan's economic viability correlates with the number of children in its factories. The child labor pool is all but inexhaustible, owing in part to a birth rate that is among the world's highest and to an education system that can accommodate only about a third of the country's school-age children. Each year millions of children enter the labor force, where they compete with



PIERO GUERINI/WOODFIN CAMP AND ASSOCIATES

our prayers as our savior from beggary and destitution." To his relief, Sadique agrees at once, extending a manicured hand with a speed that suggests he was prepared to pay more and got a bargain. In any event, he can afford to be generous. The money he offers Mirza, called a *peshgi*, will be paid in installments, and he will deduct from it all costs associated with Nadeem's maintenance and training. Many of the deductions are contrived and inflated. Parents are

his own on his tunic) and accepting from him a first installment of 200 rupees. The parties are bound only by their word: no contracts are signed; no witnesses are present. "Your boy now belongs to me," Sadique says as Mirza pockets the banknotes. "Please understand that so long as he works under my roof he is answerable only to me. Inform him that the needs of my shop take priority over those of his family, and he must do all he can to please me. If he

adults—often even with their parents—for what little work is available. In many regions the surplus of cheap child labor has depressed the already inadequate adult wage to the point where a parent and child together now earn less than the parent alone earned a year ago. As long as children are put to work, poverty will spread and standards of living will continue to decline.

To be sure, child labor is an institution throughout the Third World, and

its incidence has been increasing in countries that are usually described as advanced. The worldwide population of children under fourteen who work full-time is thought to exceed 200 million. But few countries have done less to abolish or to contain the practice than Pakistan. And fewer still have a ruling class that opposes workplace reform and human-rights initiatives as vigorously. Given its relative prosperity, its constitutional prohibition against child labor, and its leaders' signatures on every UN human- and child-rights convention, Pakistan's de facto dependency on child labor is troubling and to its critics inexcusable.

"Inaction speaks louder than words," says I. A. Rehman, the director of the HRCP. "This government is in continuous violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and has consistently refused to enforce those very laws it enacted to protect its most vulnerable citizens. We have far more in the way of resources and legal remedies than China, India, and Indonesia, and we do far less for our young than they. The problem is lack of political will. The problem is greed."

The median age of children now entering the Pakistani work force is seven. Two years ago it was eight. Two years from now it may be six. In the lowest castes, children become laborers almost as soon as they can walk. Much of the nation's farmland is worked by toddlers, yoked teams of three-, four-, and five-year-olds who plough, seed, and glean fields from dawn to dusk. On any given morning the canal banks and irrigation ditches in rural villages are lined with urchins who stand no taller than the piles of laundry they wash for their wealthier neighbors. Even the world-class industries of Islamabad, the modern capital, are staffed in large part by children and adolescents; politicians traveling to the National Assembly can't help noticing the ragged youths entering and exiting the brick factories, steel mills, and stone-crushing plants at all hours of the day and night. These children work with a minimum of adult supervision. An overseer comes by periodically to mark their progress and to

give them instructions or a few encouraging blows, but for the better part of the workday they are left to themselves. "Children are cheaper to run than tractors and smarter than oxen," explains one Rawalpindi landowner. He prefers field hands between seven and ten years old, "because they have the most energy, although they lack discipline."

In rural areas children are raised without health care, sanitation, or education; many are as starved for affection as for food. As soon as they're old enough to have an elementary understanding of their circumstances, their parents teach them that they are expected to pay their way, to make sacrifices, and, if necessary, to travel far from home and live with strangers. "When my children were three, I told them they must be prepared to work for the good of the family," says Asma, a Sheikhpura villager who bonded her five children to masters in distant villages. "I told them again and again that they would be bonded at five. And when the time came for them to go, they were prepared and went without complaint."

Bonding is common practice among the lower castes, and although the decision to part with their children is not made lightly, parents do not agonize over it. Neither, evidently, do the children, who regard bonding as a rite of passage, the event that transforms them into adults. Many look forward to it in the same way that American children look forward to a first communion or getting a driver's license. They are eager to cast off childhood, even if to do so means taking on adult burdens. Ir-fana, a twelve-year-old schoolgirl who spent four years as a brick worker before she was freed by an anti-slavery organization, remembers feeling relieved when her father handed her over at age six to a kiln owner. "My friends and I knew that sooner or later we'd be sent off to the factories or the fields. We were tired of doing chores and minding infants. We looked forward to the day when we'd be given responsibilities and the chance to earn money. At the time work seemed glamorous and children who worked seemed quite important."

She soon learned otherwise. "For the masters, bonded children are a commodity. My master bought, sold, and traded us like livestock, and sometimes he shipped us great distances. The boys were beaten frequently to make them work long hours. The girls were often violated. My best friend got ill after she was raped, and when she couldn't work, the master sold her to a friend of his in a village a thousand kilometers away. Her family was never told where she was sent, and they never saw her again."

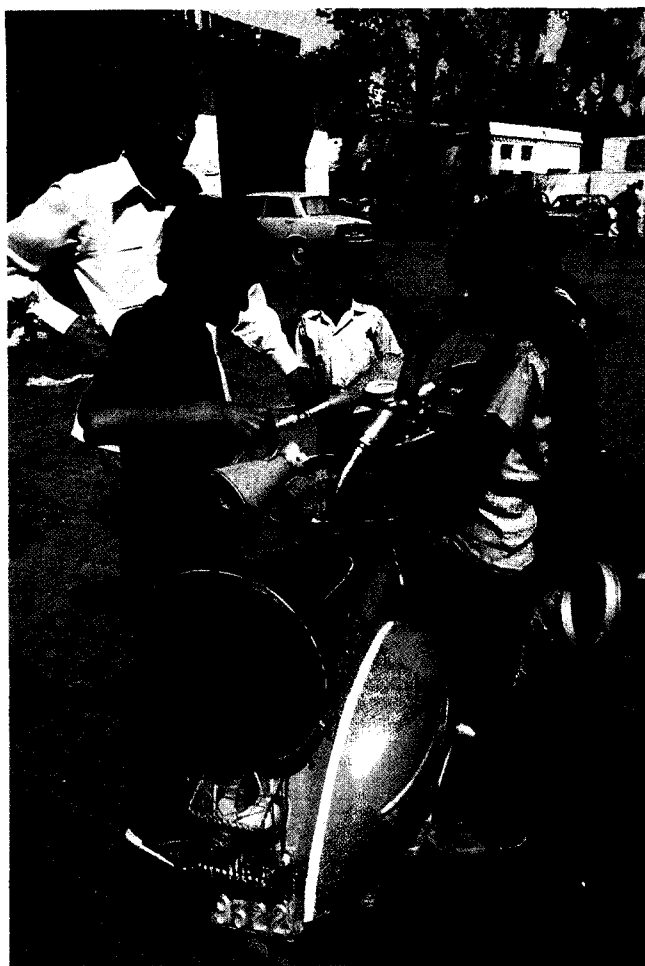
Early in this decade the Pakistan National Assembly enacted two labor laws meant to curb such practices. The first, The Employment of Children Act of 1991, prohibited the use of child labor in hazardous occupations and environments. The second, The Bonded Labor Act of 1992, abolished indentured servitude and the *peshgi* system. As progressive as these laws were, the government failed to provide for their implementation and enforcement. It also neglected to inform the millions of working children and indentured servants that they were free and released from their debts. "We prefer to leave enforcement to the discretion of the police," says a Ministry of Labor official. "They understand best the needs of their community. Law is not an absolute. We must expect a certain flexibility on the part of those who enforce it. Could this sometimes mean looking the other way? Absolutely."

A Diminutive Entrepreneur

THE farther authorities are from a major city in Pakistan, the less likely they are to pursue violators of the child-labor laws. To leave Lahore, the nation's intellectual and commercial center, is to enter a land populated and run by children. The change is as abrupt as it is extreme. The roads just beyond the city limits are congested with donkey carts, all of them driven by teamsters of eight or nine. Boys seem to have a monopoly on roadside attractions: gas stations, auto-repair centers, restaurants. When I pull into the Star Petroleum station on

the Ferozpur Road, five miles from Lahore, three boys rush out of the garage to service my car. They are twelve, eight, and seven, and wear uniforms intended for men twice their size. The eldest has rolled up his pants and sleeves, but his colleagues helplessly trail theirs in the dirt. While the older boys fill my tank with a rusted hand pump, the youngest climbs onto the hood and cleans the windshield with a dangling sleeve. When I pull away, the boys rush back to the garage and to a diesel engine they are attempting to rebuild between fill-ups. No adults are visible on the premises.

Adults are also in short supply at the crossroads markets that provide villagers with everything from prayer mats to surgical instruments. Twelve of the fifteen stands at the Tohkar Road market are managed by children under fourteen. The fruit stand is run by a tyrannical eight-year-old boy and his four- and five-year-old sisters. The boy spends his morning slicing melons with a knife half his size, while behind him the girls sort cartloads of fruit. At the next stall two eleven-year-old cousins fashion sandals out of discarded tires. They work from dawn to dusk six days a week, and make more than 1,200 pairs each week. Behind the last stall another boy is struggling to unload a stack of carpets from his donkey cart. He weighs seventy pounds. The twenty-odd carpets in his cart weigh sixty pounds apiece, and it takes him ten minutes of yanking, hefting, and cursing to get each one into the stall. The stall's proprietor watches him with interest, but his concern is strictly for the merchandise. He is a tall, heavyset forty-year-old who looks as if he could unload the entire cart in fifteen minutes without breaking a sweat. But he makes no move to help the boy, and seems to regard his exer-



Young attendants at a gas station

tions as routine. So do the passersby. And, for that matter, so does the boy.

His name is Faiz. A lively nine-year-old, he has been working as a hauler since he was six. He attended school for two years, but dropped out when an elderly neighbor offered him an advantageous lease on the cart and donkey. He runs the business alone, and spends his days scrounging for hauling jobs and shuttling produce, scrap metal, and crafts around six villages. He averages sixty miles a week—no easy feat with a donkey that trots at three miles an hour. “The work is painful and the days are long, but I earn enough to feed myself and tend the donkey,” Faiz says with an entrepreneur’s pride. The key to his success is underbidding the competition; his rates are a tenth of his predecessor’s. “It is reasonable that people should pay me less. My equipment is the same as an adult’s, but I am small

and have a fraction of an adult’s strength. I take longer to make deliveries, so I must charge less. My hope is that the more goods I move, the stronger I will get and the more I can charge.”

Soon after I arrived in Pakistan, I arranged a trip to a town whose major factories were rumored to enslave very young children. I found myself hoping during the journey there that the children I saw working in fields, on the roads, at the marketplaces, would prepare me for the worst. They did not. No amount of preparation could have lessened the shock and revulsion I felt on entering a sporting-goods factory in the town of Sialkot, seventy miles from Lahore, where scores of children, most of them aged five to ten, produce soccer balls by hand for forty rupees, or about \$1.20, a day. The

children work eighty hours a week in near-total darkness and total silence. According to the foreman, the darkness is both an economy and a precautionary measure; child-rights activists have difficulty taking photographs and gathering evidence of wrongdoing if the lighting is poor. The silence is to ensure product quality: “If the children speak, they are not giving their complete attention to the product and are liable to make errors.” The children are permitted one thirty-minute meal break each day; they are punished if they take longer. They are also punished if they fall asleep, if their workbenches are sloppy, if they waste material or miscut a pattern, if they complain of mistreatment to their parents or speak to strangers outside the factory. A partial list of “infractions” for which they may be punished is tacked to a wall near the entrance. It’s a document of dubious utility: the children are illiterate. Punishments are doled out in a storage closet at the rear of the factory. There,

amid bales of wadding and leather, children are hung upside down by their knees, starved, caned, or lashed. (In the interests of economy the foreman uses a lash made from scrap soccer-ball leather.) The punishment room is a standard feature of a Pakistani factory, as common as a lunchroom at a Detroit assembly plant.

The town's other factories are no better, and many are worse. Here are brick kilns where five-year-olds work hip-deep in slurry pits, where adolescent girls stoke furnaces in 160° heat. Here are tanneries where nursing mothers mix vats of chemical dye, textile mills where eight-year-olds tend looms and breathe air thick with cotton dust.

When confronted with questions from a foreigner about their use of child labor, industrialists respond in one of two ways: they attack the questioner or they deliver a lengthy lecture about the role of children in Pakistan's development. The attacks are not always verbal. Last June a Norwegian trade-union delegation was attacked at the Sialkot sporting-goods factory by three or four armed men who were believed to work for the factory's owner. The delegation's guide and cameraman were severely beaten and the latter required hospitalization. The police characterized the attackers as "civic-minded" and warned the delegation against inspecting other area factories and "unnecessarily antagonizing factory owners."

More common, though, is the industrialist who ushers the foreign investigator into his office, plies him with coffee and cake, and tells him in his friendliest manner that child labor is a tradition the West cannot understand and must not attempt to change. "Our country has historically suffered from a labor shortage, a deficit of able-bodied men," says Imran Malik, a promi-

nent Lahore carpet exporter and the vice-chairman of the Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association. "Children have compensated for this shortage. They have worked when adults could not. They have helped construct Pakistan's infrastructure and advanced its industry. For thousands of years children have worked alongside their parents in their villages. The work they now do in factories and workshops is an extension of this tradition, and in most ways an improvement on it. The children earn more than they would elsewhere. They contribute significantly to their family's security and raise their standard of living."

The industrialist's argument is accurate only in its assertion that Pakistani children have traditionally worked with their families. But children seldom worked *outside* the family until the 1960s, when the Islamic Republic made

a dramatic effort to expand its manufacturing base. This led to a spectacular and disproportionately large increase in the number of children working outside the home, outside the village, at factories and workshops whose owners sought to maximize profits by keeping down labor costs. The rise in child abuse was as meteoric as the rise in child labor. The children working in these factories were beyond the reach or care of their families and were increasingly the victims of industrial accidents, kidnapping, and mistreatment.

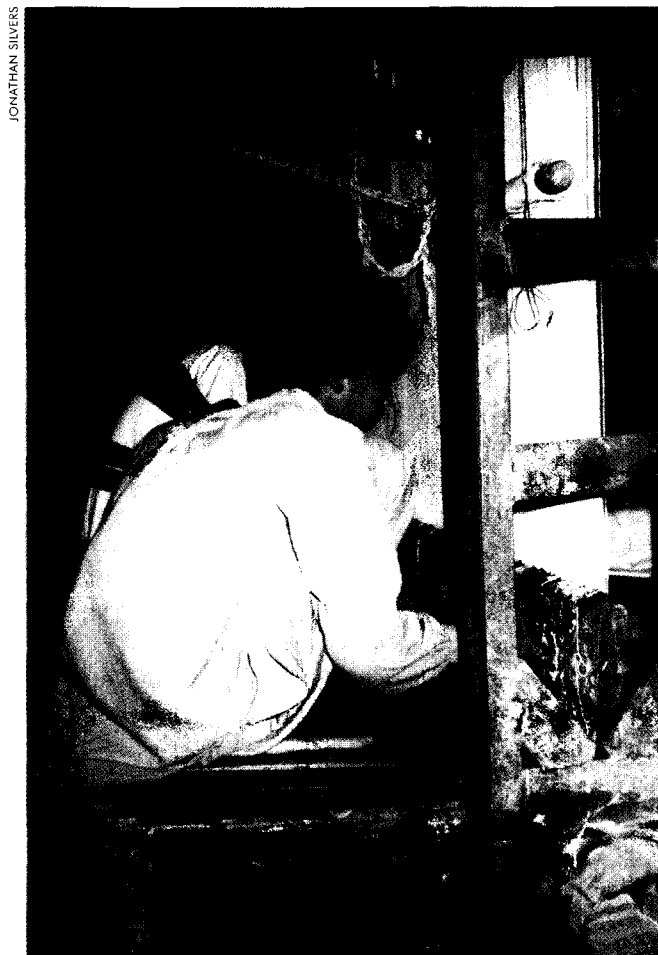
A Mixed Curse

"If employers would apply as much ingenuity to their manufacturing processes as they do to evading labor laws, we'd have no child-labor problem," says Najanuddin Najmi, the director general of the Workers Education Program, a government agency. "There's little doubt that inexpensive child labor has fueled Pak-

istan's economic growth. Entire industries have relocated to Pakistan because of the abundance of cheap child labor and our lax labor laws. At the same time, child labor has hindered our industrial development, especially in the use of advanced technologies. Why should a manufacturer invest in labor-saving technology when labor-intensive mechanisms are so much cheaper? We are discovering more and more factories that have been redesigned and retooled so that only children can work there."

Child labor has been a mixed curse for all of southern Asia, expanding its industrial capacity while generating an unprecedented assortment of social problems. Not surprisingly, Pakistan's leaders are of two minds on the subject. Speaking officially, they

At the carpet looms of Wasan Pura



JONATHAN SILVERS

deplore the practice and have nothing but pity for the roughly 11 million children working in factories, in fields, and on the streets. Speaking pragmatically, they regard the practice as a distasteful but unavoidable part of an emerging economy which time and prosperity will end. They are quick to take offense (and quicker to take the offensive) when human-rights activists suggest that they have ignored the problem.

"Westerners conveniently forget their own shameful histories when they come here," says Shabbir Jamal, an adviser to the Ministry of Labor. "Europeans addressed slavery and child labor only after they became prosperous. Pakistan has only now entered an era of economic stability that will allow us to expand our horizons and address social concerns. Just as we are catching up with the West in industrial development, so we are catching up in workplace and social reforms. We are accelerating the pace of reform and have resolved to create viable welfare and educational structures that will eradicate child labor in the foreseeable future."

Foreseeable may be a long way off. At the moment Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto seems more interested in outfitting her army than in reforming Pakistani society; her government has embarked on an ambitious military buildup that has already imperiled the region. Its first victims have been Pakistan's lower castes, the working poor who are accustomed to receiving little in the way of social services and must now make do with less. In 1994 military spending was 240 percent as high as spending on health and education combined; the disparity is expected to widen in years to come. Spending on education remains among the world's lowest. Only 37 percent of Pakistan's 25 million school-age children complete primary school—as compared with a world average of 79 percent and a South Asian average of approximately 50 percent. By the year 2000 less than a third of Pakistani children will attend school. The rest will enter the work force or become beggars.

Behind these statistics lurks an un-

pleasant truth: despite its modern views on warfare and industrialization, Pakistan remains a feudal society, committed to maintaining traditions that over the centuries have served its upper castes well. The lords—factory owners, exporters, financiers—reflexively oppose any reforms that might weaken their authority, lower their profit margins, or enfranchise the workers. "There is room for improvement in any society," the industrialist Imram Malik says. "But we feel that the present situation is acceptable the way it is. The National Assembly must not rush through reforms without first evaluating their impact on productivity and sales. Our position is that the government must avoid so-called humanitarian measures that harm our competitive advantages." On those rare occasions when a reform does squeak through, the backlash is fierce. For example, when the legislature last year approved a modest tax on bricks to fund an education program, brick-kiln owners staged a ten-day nationwide protest and threatened to suspend production, crippling construction, until the tax was repealed. Trade associations have used similar strong-arm tactics to fight minimum-wage legislation, occupational-safety regulations, and trade-union activity.

"The Charter of Freedom"

WITH a government that is at best ambivalent about social issues and an industrial sector resistant to workplace reform, the task of abolishing child labor has fallen to the human-rights community. But in a country where corruption is pervasive and education scarce, social activists are everyone's natural enemy. The ruling class despises them for assaulting its profitable traditions. The lower castes suspect them of ulterior motives. (Laborers are forever asking activists, "Why would an educated man trouble himself with the poor?") Consequently, activists are frequent targets of slander, police harassment, and lawsuits. They are beaten just as frequently, and on occasion they are killed.

Yet they persist, and sometimes they prevail. If human-rights organizations are judged by the number of people they have helped, the Bonded Labor Liberation Front is probably the most successful in Pakistan. Since its founding, in 1988, the BLLF has led the fight against bonded and child labor, liberating 30,000 adults and children—frequently entire families—from brick kilns, carpet factories, and farms, and placing 11,000 children in its own primary school system (its motto: "Struggle against slavery through education"). At the same time, it has won 25,000 high-court cases against abusive and unscrupulous employers, and helped to push the recent labor legislation through the National Assembly.

"Our victories amount to a hardship," says Ehsan Ulla Khan, the BLLF's founder and guiding force. "The state has done nothing to enforce the anti-slavery laws or even to inform the public that child and bonded labor have been outlawed. It's evident that if the enslaved workers are to be delivered from bondage, private citizens will have to do the delivering. That is, we will have to proclaim the end of slavery, educate workers, monitor employer compliance, and take legal action when necessary, because the state lacks the will and resources to do so."

With little funding, the BLLF wages a two-front war against enterprises that use child and bonded labor. While its legal advisers engage the courts and the legislature, its field staff shuttles around the country, informing workers of their recently acquired rights and distributing a pamphlet known as "The Charter of Freedom," which enumerates those rights in simple language. If a bonded laborer—child or adult—asks for its help, the BLLF takes whatever legal action is necessary to secure his or her release.

These days a surprising number of workers are refusing the pamphlet and turning their backs on BLLF staff members. This is an expression less of ingratitude than of fear. Employers throughout Pakistan are cautioning their workers against consorting with reformers who spread "false rumors" about

the end of bonded labor. Many workers have been threatened with dismissal or violence if they speak with “the abolitionists” or are caught with “illegal communist propaganda.”

So effective is the factory owners’ disinformation campaign that workers literally flee when approached by BLLF staff members. This happened recently outside a Muridke brick factory to a BLLF leader I’ll call Tariq. The fifty-odd kiln workers leaving the factory at the end of the workday scattered in all directions when they noticed Tariq lingering outside the factory gate, pamphlets in hand. One soot-covered girl of eight, left behind in the confusion, burst into tears when Tariq asked if she needed help. Between sobs the girl pleaded, “Please, sir, I have nothing to tell you. Please let me go.”

Tariq did, albeit reluctantly. He has witnessed scenes like this countless times; they happen more and more often. If they discourage him (how could they not?), he takes care not to let anyone know. He describes his work as “an outgrowth of my patriotism.” “What we do is meant not to shame Pakistan before the world but to create a Pakistan that respects the rights of all its peoples and encourages human potential.” Tariq is a tall, pensive thirty-nine-year-old, an artist by training and by temperament. He traces his interest in child labor to an afternoon five years ago when an anti-slavery activist entered

his graphic-design studio in need of a brochure for his struggling organization. “Ehsan Ulla Khan had little money to spare, and he intimated that he’d rather not pay at all for the design work,” Tariq told me. “I was just starting out in business and had no interest in politics or human rights. But I was moved by his photos of the children and agreed to do the work.” Within six months Tariq was preparing all of the BLLF’s documents; within a year he was over-

seeing its operations. Today he is its factotum: equal parts tactician, recruiter, instructor, fundraiser, morale-booster.

Some days he is also part spy. In addition to their assigned duties, the BLLF’s 600 staff members are encouraged to spend their free time scrounging for leads on factory owners who are especially abusive to children. All rumors are passed on to the BLLF’s Lahore headquarters. Tariq does what he can to substantiate the worst of them,

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Boys in a quarry do the work of machines, hauling stones for highway construction

usually by touring the factories. It’s a duty he dislikes. For one thing, it’s exhausting: there are too many leads, too many rumors to verify. For another, it’s dangerous: he’s had numerous clashes with publicity-shy employers and their thugs. He prefers to travel alone, reasoning that one man is less conspicuous and less of a threat than is a group. And despite his reservations he is adept at subterfuge, at gaining entry to factories by masquerading as a laborer, a whole-

saler, an exporter. “I do not misrepresent myself,” he says. “But if a foreman mistakes me for a businessman or a wholesaler, I don’t correct him.”

His first stop one day last summer was a carpet workshop in a village twenty-four miles from Lahore. The village amounted to thirty brick huts, and the workshop was small in proportion—about the size of a subway car, and about as appealing. The long, narrow room contained a dozen upright looms. On each rough-hewn work-



bench between the looms squatted a carpet weaver. The room was dark and airless. Such light as there was came from a single ceiling fixture, two of its four bulbs burned out. A thermometer read 105°, and the mud walls were hot to the touch. A window promised some relief, but it was closed against fabric-eating insects.

Tariq entered quietly, in slacks, shirt, and patent-leather loafers. This outfit is uncommon in the provinces; he hoped

it marked him as a person with Western tastes, and his vehicle, a Toyota Land Cruiser (donated to the BLLF by UNICEF), which he had parked conspicuously close to the entrance, marked him as a man of means—a buyer, a broker, an exporter. The weavers smiled at him, and a few bowed, but no one dared speak to him. Tariq took advantage of their reverence—and the master's absence—by circling the room, noting its conditions. After two circuits he began guessing the ages of the

carpet master at age five, and now worked six days a week at the shop. Their workday started at 6:00 A.M. and ended at 8:00 P.M., except, they said, when the master was behind on his quotas and forced them to work around the clock. They were small, thin, malnourished, their spines curved from lack of exercise and from squatting before the loom. Their hands were covered with calluses and scars, their fingers gnarled from repetitive work. Their breathing was labored, sugges-

four to six months to complete. The finest, most intricate carpets have the highest density of knots. The smaller the knot, the more knots the weaver can cram into his lattice and the more valuable the finished carpet. Small knots are, of course, made most easily by small hands. Each carpet Akbar completed would retail in the United States for about \$2,000—more than the boy would earn in ten years.

Observing a child carpet weaver at work generates in an American alternating currents of admiration and anger. At one moment the boy seems a prodigy, his carpet a lesson in geometry and colors. His patience is remarkable; his artistry seems effortless and of the highest order—comparable to, say, that of a great medieval tapestry master. The next moment he fumbles with his scissors, and one notices a welt on his forearm. Suddenly the monotony of tying thousands of threads each hour seems like torture of the worst sort—like a death sentence, which in a way it is.

After ten minutes Tariq knelt by Akbar's side and said softly, "You're very good at this. The master must be quite pleased with you." The boy shook his head and grimaced. "The master says I am slow and clumsy."

Tariq placed a sympathetic hand on the boy's shoulder. "Have you been punished for poor work?" he asked. The boy shrugged and tied a red knot. Tariq repeated the ques-

tion. This time the boy tied a dozen knots before answering him, in a conspiratorial whisper. "The master screams at us all the time, and sometimes he beats us," he said. "He is less severe with the younger boys. We're slapped often. Once or twice he lashed us with a cane. I was beaten ten days ago, after I made many errors of color in a carpet. He struck me with his fist quite hard on the face." By way of corroborating this, Akbar lifted a forelock, revealing a



GILLES RIGOUT/STYMA

young weavers: "Are you twelve?" The boy nodded. Tariq pointed to the next. "Fourteen?" Another nod and a smile. "Ten?" This time the nod was shy, and someone mentioned that the day before had been the boy's birthday. Tariq wished him health and happiness.

Of the twelve weavers, five were eleven to fourteen, and four were under ten. The two youngest were brothers named Akbar and Ashraf, aged eight and nine. They had been bonded to the

tive of tuberculosis. Collectively these ailments, which pathologists call captive-child syndrome, kill half of Pakistan's working children by age twelve.

Tariq and I watched Akbar in silence for some time. A hand-knotted carpet is made by tying short lengths of fine colored thread to a lattice of heavier white threads. The process is labor-intensive and tedious: a single four-by-six-foot carpet contains well over a million knots and takes an experienced weaver

multicolored bruise on his right temple. Evidently the master did not consider the blow sufficient punishment: "I was fined one thousand rupees and made to correct the errors by working two days straight." The fine was added to Akbar's debt, and would extend his "apprenticeship" by several months.

"Do you like working here?"

"Oh, no, sir, staying here longer fills me with dread. I know I must learn a trade. But my parents are so far away, and all my friends are in school. My brother and I would like to be with our family. We'd like to play with our friends. This is not the way children should live."

Tariq listened to this outpouring without emotion. He has cultivated what he calls a surgeon's insensitivity to ravaged flesh, "because otherwise my heart would break ten times a day." Neither Akbar nor the others knew that child labor was illegal, that they were free to leave the workshop whenever they wished.

Tariq left the factory and, on a whim, headed for the district police headquarters. As a rule BLLF members are closely observant of legal procedure, lest they be accused of subversive activity. The organization's legal advisers typically spend weeks drafting a formal complaint against a factory, based on members' espionage, before they register it with a high-court magistrate. Right now, however, Tariq was as interested in testing the responsiveness of the police as in penalizing the factory owner.

The nearest police station is a colonial relic on the Lahore road in Muridke. Tariq was caught up in the usual bureaucratic chaos on entering. The foyer was packed with police officers, soldiers, crime victims, and criminals, half of them shouting, the other half covering their ears against the noise. Every now and then the soldiers tried to impose order on the crowd, but with tattered uniforms and clipless rifles their authority went only so far. Familiar with such outposts, Tariq took his place in a line and forty minutes later was face-to-face with the district sergeant. It was ten in the morning. The sergeant

had been at his post for two hours, but it could have been 200 for the way he looked. Tariq told him about the conditions in the workshop, about the children. The sergeant was perplexed. "Is this a crime?" he asked. "No one has ever complained before. What do you want us to do about it?" Tariq suggested sending officers to investigate, along with a medical-services crew for the children.

The sergeant left to consult his superior. Two minutes later he returned with the superintendent, a gracious, mustachioed man of fifty. "We are not unsympathetic to your complaint," the superintendent informed Tariq. "But the place you describe is registered as a home enterprise. It is run by a small landowner, and the workers are his immediate family. Family businesses are exempt from the labor laws. This enterprise is not illegal." The superintendent opened a binder and showed Tariq the workshop's registration certificate. Tariq attempted to correct him, but the superintendent said, "What you say may or may not be true. Unfortunately, our jurisdiction does not include child labor. I have no authority to investigate a private workplace. I have no evidence that the children are working there against their will or that their lives are in jeopardy. The mechanism for doing what you ask simply does not exist here."

Tariq was not disappointed, nor was he surprised. He expected no better, and was even pleased that he had rated an audience with the superintendent. Corruption is pervasive in the justice system: for a small consideration the police will look the other way when employers misuse their workers. In several districts the police are notorious for colluding with employers—supplying factories with children who have been abducted from itinerant poor families, orphanages, schools. Not long ago a boy of nine escaped from an abusive landowner and sought help from a police sergeant at this very station. The boy claimed that he had been held captive and tortured; he begged the police to return him to his parents. Instead the sergeant ordered the "fugitive" returned

in shackles to the landowner. The sergeant later made the landowner a gift of the shackles, suggesting that they be used on other disruptive children.

The Death of Iqbal Masih

IN 1992 Pakistani carpet exports fell for the first time in two decades. The fall was slight in absolute terms—no more than three or four percentage points—but it indicated that Western consumers were shying away from luxury goods made by Third World children. Carpet makers' fears were confirmed when in 1993 and 1994 sales fell sharply in several of the largest markets for Pakistani exports. Since carpets were an important source of foreign currency, the decline sent shock waves throughout the Pakistani economy. At a 1993 conference, officials of the Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association blamed the decline on "subversive domestic organizations which are conducting misleading and false international media campaigns abroad about the use of child labor in our manufacturing processes." The conference concluded on an optimistic note: "The memory of Western consumers is brief and our enemies' meager resources cannot sustain their destructive campaign for much longer."

Whatever hopes the carpet makers had for a reversal of their misfortunes were dashed in 1994, when human-rights organizations around the world acclaimed a twelve-year-old former slave named Iqbal Masih for his crusade against child labor. A small, sickly boy, Iqbal had been bonded at age four to a village carpet maker. He spent much of the next six years chained to a loom, which he worked fourteen hours a day, six days a week. He was fed just enough to keep him functioning, and was beaten more often than the other children at the workshop, because, unlike them, he defied the master time and again, refusing to work and on occasion attempting to escape. At ten he slipped his chains and sought the help of the BLLF, which secured

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him his freedom and a place in a primary school.

Frail as he was, Iqbal was a child of rare gifts, possessed of an intellectual maturity beyond his years and a precocious sense of justice. He applied these gifts to the anti-slavery movement, and achieved results that would be impressive for a Nobel laureate, let alone a schoolboy. By his twelfth birthday he had helped to liberate 3,000 children from bondage at textile and brick factories, tanneries, steelworks—industries at the heart of the Pakistani economy. He was subsequently honored by the International Labor Organization, in Sweden; by Reebok, which presented him with its prestigious Human Rights Youth in Action Award (for “his courage and ingenuity in righting a centuries-old wrong”) in Boston in December of 1994; and by ABC News, which featured him as its Person of the Week. He used his unlikely celebrity status to remind consumers that “the world’s two hundred million enslaved children are your responsibility.” Subsequent to his travels millions of people in the United States and Europe searched their souls and decided that they could do without products of doubtful origin from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

Iqbal attained a corresponding notoriety in Pakistan, particularly among the politicians and industrialists whose feudal practices he opposed. They responded with smear campaigns and the occasional threat of violence. Iqbal dismissed these threats, telling his friends that they encouraged him to work harder. He reasoned that grown men would harm a child only as a last resort, when their own position proved vulnerable.

On the evening of April 16, 1995, Easter Sunday, Iqbal Masih was shot dead while visiting relatives in a rural village. Immediately afterward Ehsan Ulla Khan declared that the slain youth

was the victim of “a mafia conspiracy.” In the days that followed, Khan embellished his conspiracy theory for anyone willing to listen. “I emphatically say that the carpet mafia is responsible for this brutal killing . . . Iqbal has become a symbol of our struggle against slavery and was not afraid to expose the inhuman practices prevailing in the carpet industry. I have no doubt that the police are also a part of the conspiracy.” However, Khan did not support his fulminations with evidence. “I do not

Eight hundred mourners crowded into the Muridke cemetery for Iqbal’s funeral. A week later 3,000 protesters, half of them under twelve, marched through the streets of Lahore demanding an end to child labor. A few days after the funeral Khan left Pakistan to consult with children’s-rights activists in Europe. There he repeated his accusations to great effect at conferences, on television, before lawmakers. Iqbal was proclaimed a “martyr for the cause of bonded labor”; his murder became a

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*Iqbal's grave; his mother,
Inayat Bibi; a protest rally
after Iqbal's funeral*



rely on evidence,” he told his critics. “I have my instinct. How else do you explain how, in a village where no murder has occurred for a decade, the one child who poses a threat to the carpet owners is gunned down? Coincidence is never so cruel.” To the claim of the local police that Iqbal’s murder was an isolated incident Khan retorts, “The evidence can be found if the police could be bothered to look.” The killing remains unsolved.

cause célèbre among the intelligentsia. Khan called upon the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations to ban the import and sale of all products made by children, especially carpets. “I appeal to importers and consumers: say no and only no to child-made carpets,” he said. “This is the last message of Iqbal. It would be an insult to his blood and memory if people continue to buy child-made products in any part of the world.”

Western consumers have responded to Khan's plea. Sales of imported carpets have fallen precipitously in recent months. Bowing to public pressure, importers in the United States, Sweden, Italy, Britain, France, and Germany by last June had canceled carpet orders collectively valued at \$10 million. At the same time, human-rights groups and individual sympathizers have donated large sums to support and expand BLLF operations. Ironically, Iqbal's death opened doors and purses

his colleagues, "Our industry is the victim of enemy agents who spread lies and fictions around the world that bonded labor and child labor are utilized in the production of hand-knotted carpets. They are not and have never been." He condemned the BLLF and its allies as Jewish and Indian enemies who had launched a systematic campaign to damage the reputation of Pakistan's carpet industry for their own profit. His remarks were enthusiastically endorsed by the Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers

rector of Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), last May launched an inquiry into the BLLF on the strength of information he had received from highly placed sources suggesting that the organization was supported by "Pakistan's enemies." He later said, "I consider the information credible and will do all I can to protect our country's commercial interests from unscrupulous enemies." At the same time, Pakistan's leading newspapers began running "exposés" of abolitionist leaders, the nicest of which characterized Ehsan Ulla Khan as a philandering bigamist with "indisputable ties to Jewish and Indian agencies hostile to Pakistan." The publishers of these newspapers are suspected of having large financial interests in industries employing child labor.

The FIA is a secret police force, and one of its best-kept secrets is whom it works for. Nominally an organ of the state, it is not above accepting freelance assignments from prominent individuals and commercial groups. The extent of its extralegal activities is anyone's guess, but a highly respected human-rights investigator believes that "there is close cooperation between carpet interests, feudal lords, segments of the police force, and the administration—district commissioners, the courts, and government officials. Financially resourceful drug barons are also a part of the scene."

Whoever the client, the FIA provides an assortment of services straight out of the KGB handbook: wiretaps, tails, searches, arrests, harassment, and varying degrees of corporal punishment.

These services were very much in evidence on a Thursday afternoon in late June, when the FIA raided the BLLF's Lahore headquarters. The detail consisted of ten men, all in plain clothes, who scrambled up four flights of stairs to the tiny office in no time



JONATHAN SILVERS



JONATHAN SILVERS



ILYAS DEAN/SYGMA

that were previously closed to Khan.

Westerners, who have seen economic weapons used to achieve social reforms, might expect canceled orders to result in negotiation and, with luck, accommodation between industrialists and activists. Pakistan's industrialists, however, have chosen the questionable tactic of denying the existence of bonded labor in their factories. Shahid Rashid Butt, the president of the Islamabad Carpet Exporters Association, told

and Exporters Association and echoed in the National Assembly.

"These charges flew in the face not just of reason but also of an extraordinary amount of evidence," says I. A. Rehman, the director of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. "Anywhere else they would have been laughed at and dismissed. Here they were accepted as fact and acted on." At the urging of politicians and industrialists, Javed Mahmood, the assistant di-

flat. These were not ordinary policemen; this was not the usual surprise “inspection” (read “intimidation”) to which all nongovernment organizations are periodically subjected. These were professional agents, lithe and expert, commanded by a severe officer in a freshly pressed safari suit. After lining the BLLF workers up against a wall, he ordered his troops to “confiscate anything that may incriminate them.” The agents took a liberal view of “incriminate,” and packed up computers, filing cabinets, fax machines, photocopiers, telephones, stationery, posters, bicycles—and the cashbox containing the monthly payroll. Their depredations were supervised by a small man who was distinctly not a policeman. He represented, it turned out, the Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association. His purpose, he said, was “to protect the interests of legitimate businessmen.” Every so often he consulted with the commander.

When one BLLF worker tried to protest, an agent threw her against a wall and held a rifle butt inches from her face. When another worker demanded to see a search warrant, the commander informed her that none was necessary, because “we are acting to prevent terrorism.” The association representative nodded in agreement.

Fifteen minutes later the detail was gone, along with the office equipment and furnishings. All that remained was a heap of broken furniture, a workers’-rights poster, and a BLLF flag dangling out an open window. Several staff workers had been taken away as well, to an FIA holding center, where they were interrogated for three days.

Two days later another FIA detail raided the BLLF’s “Freedom Campus” training facility in Lahore, along with several of its primary schools around the country. Once again the agents were indiscriminating. They seized everything movable (“items used to obstruct valid commercial interests”) and mistreated the staff without respect for position or age. Teachers, drivers, secretaries, and peasant families seeking refuge from violent employers were interrogated along with administrators,

advocates, attorneys, and fundraisers.

After an earlier raid on BLLF headquarters Fatima Ghulam, the director of the BLLF’s women’s-education program, was held for two days. “An officer promised to release me immediately if I agreed to inform against Ehsan Ulla Khan and some of the others,” Ghulam says. “He wanted me to testify that Khan is a subversive, an enemy agent, and that the BLLF receives money from foreign governments. He said he had tapped my telephone conversations and had recordings of me discussing treasonable acts. If I wanted to avoid prosecution, I would have to cooperate with the FIA. I refused, and he kept me without food or water. When I wouldn’t speak to him the next day, he slapped me and dragged me around the room.”

Not to be outdone, the Pakistani press stepped up its campaign against the BLLF. Last summer a number of newspapers whose editorial pages conceded that they were “troubled by the carpet export crisis” reported the following “facts”: Khan himself had murdered Iqbal Masih to win sympathy for the BLLF; Khan had misappropriated BLLF funds to support his own decadent lifestyle; Khan routinely used BLLF schoolchildren as sex partners and house slaves; Iqbal Masih was a twenty-one-year-old midjet whom Khan paid to masquerade as a carpet child; the BLLF was an outpost of India’s intelligence agency; Khan was an Indian agent working to disgrace the Pakistani carpet trade. These same papers also “revealed” that carpet workers enjoy a higher standard of living than the average citizen, along with better working conditions. “The few children working on carpets,” one editorial assured its readers, “do so after school, in their own homes, under the supervision of loving parents.”

In the wake of these attacks BLLF operations—child-welfare programs, schools, training and education programs—nearly shut down for lack of funds and staff. Membership has suffered, and many of the legal advisers and support staff, fearing reprisals, have fallen away. Those who remain are sub-

ject to almost constant harassment: the fortunate ones have their telephones tapped; the less fortunate are shadowed around the clock. At the same time, the courts have ignored their complaints about child labor and abusive treatment by employers.

Just in case the intention of the Federal Investigation Agency was unclear, Assistant Director Mahmood in early June charged Ehsan Ulla Khan, who was still abroad, and a BLLF strategist named Zafaryab Ahmad with sedition and economic treason, capital offenses punishable by death. According to Mahmood, “The accused men conspired with the Indian espionage agency to exploit the murder of Iqbal Masih . . . causing a recurring huge financial loss to Pakistan’s business interests abroad and paving the way for India to wage economic warfare against Pakistan.” Ahmad was arrested and taken to a Lahore jail, where, after repudiating the charges (he called them “foolish and absurd”), he was denied bail. The FIA has since refused to provide BLLF attorneys with evidence supporting the charges, although Mahmood assures them that it consists of “videotapes and recordings of telephone conversations that amount to firm proof.” Mahmood has vowed to arrest Khan “the very moment he returns to Pakistan, the moment his aircraft touches down.”

Ehsan Ulla Khan remains in Europe, an unhappy exile. “They will jail me if I return to Pakistan,” he told me shortly after he left his country. “Our attorneys tell me I am of greater use to the BLLF here, speaking out against the authorities, than I would be inside a Lahore cell. I fear for my people. The police have harassed many of them, and so many more have left us out of fear. We are demoralized. We cannot pay our bills and our staff. Our schools may close and our thousands of students may end up in the very factories we saved them from. Our offices and homes are under surveillance. Our telephones are tapped. We are fighting for our survival. If the attacks do not stop soon, it is possible that the BLLF will perish. That would be tragic. What will become of the children of Pakistan?” ☞

The Poetry Judge

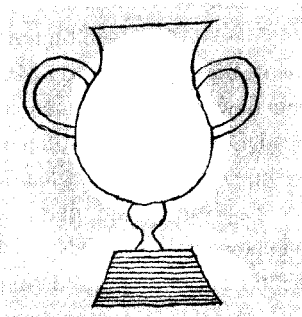
by GARRISON KEILLOR

THERE are four hundred poems," the president of the poetry society said over the phone, "but judging won't take you that long, because most of them are pretty bad." The next day the poems arrived in an apple carton, three bundles bound with rubber bands, and I spread them out in the squares of sunshine on my dining-room table. *O dining-room table, dear old friend, home of my mournful mashed potatoes.* Four hundred poems, enough to fill a bread box, by ninety-three poets who hoped to win one of four modest cash prizes—modest to you, but no prize is modest to a poet. Poets are starved for prizes—awards, with cash stipends, named after ladies with three names. And what poet truly feels, deep down in his or her heart, that he or she is unworthy of much, much more recognition, *right away?* Not me. I won the Anna von

The poetic imagination, imagined

Helmholz Phelan Prize for poetry in 1962 and am starved for another, even though I am no longer a poet. When I took the rubber bands off the bundles of poems, I could hear a faint sucking, an inhalation of poem breath, poems whispering, *Please, sir. Please.*

The president had asked me to judge the society's annual contest because, she admitted, she was having a hard time finding people to do it, and, though I had no time to give her, none, I said yes because I was angry about some awful stuff I'd read recently. It was dreadful garbage, and because dreadful people have plenty of time to serve as judges, this garbage had won awards. It was a book of essays by a Minnesota guy who specializes in taking walks in the woods and looking at the reflections of sunlight on small bodies of water and feeling grievous and wounded in a vague way—a thoughtful guy in a harsh, unfeeling world with too much molded-plastic furniture, and he pouts for a few pages and then resolves to soldier on as a sensitive person in a crass



world. This guy's stuff reads like a very long letter from someone you wish would write to someone else; it is mournful and piteous, as if he were about to ask if he could come and live in your home for a few months, but it won awards because it is pretentiously sad and is "about" something, maleness or the millennium, and

that means his books will find their way into schools, his glum reflections will be disseminated among innocent schoolchildren, and they will learn that a great writer is one who can lead the reader away from the dangerous edge of

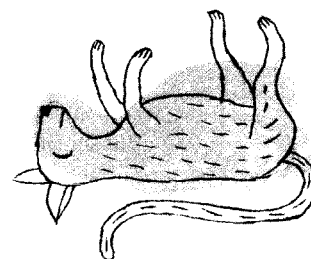
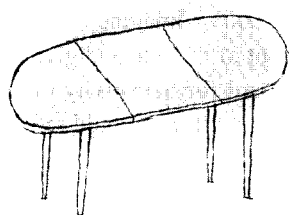
strong feeling and into the barns of boredom. So the brighter ones—though they

love to write stories!—will decide not to be writers, and we'll have another writerless generation like the thirtysomething adolescents of today, and our beloved country will sink ever deeper into the great couch of despond and vanish in the Internet. That is why I agreed to judge the poetry contest: to save America. Otherwise, why bother?

A TWO-foot stack of poems on the dining-room table, the names of the poets blacked out, each poet a number, each poem assigned a letter: 1a, 1b, 1c. *O Poem 1a, yearning, naked, wet, would you mind getting dressed, please, 1a?*

1a was an elegy to a dead cat, with classic elegiac touches—the gray sky weeping rain, dead flowers in a vase, bare boughs of trees, brown leaves skittering across the vacant yard where once Kitty had chased them—but mainly the poem was a bitter complaint against Daddy.

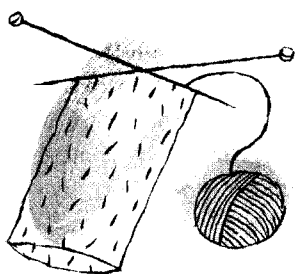
I was your happy dancing little Daddy's girl
starving for your love
but no you were too busy Daddy



your stony face and angry eyes
made me the fearful self-accusing person I am
and I did your dirty work Daddy
and went ahead and ruined my life for
forty-seven years
and only Kitty could draw me out of the shadows
only Kitty made the world a safe place in which to
have feelings
and now she is gone too

A hundred lines of this, ending with a pledge to remember the sacred cat forever ("Kitty, you will live in me as long as I have breath/your purr will be in the wind").

1b was a continuation of 1a and began "The life in me frightens you and you keep/running and running away/ but how can you escape your own daughter?" And 1c: "You're dead, Daddy, so why won't you go away?/Why do you still scare me?/And why am I unable to hate you?" The second poet offered a poem that began "If there's a bowling lane in heaven, then I know that Grandma's there," and the third had written an ode to Denise with whom the poet finds peace that can never cease, and the fourth took us to Vietnam, a line of grunts snaking through the steaming jungle, men who are scared, doped up on reefer, pissed off at the lieutenant, remembering the buddies who got blown away yesterday, and we come to a village and burn the hooches and a Vietnamese woman comes running screaming out of a burning hooch and your best friend lifts his rifle and shoots her point-blank through the head, and how do you like



it now, blue-eyed boy? And then came poet No. 5, with a poem in which life is a sweater we are knitting and we must ever be ready to pull some stitches and redo the sleeve.

I read poems for four hours straight with hardly a break. I tried to read each poem all the way to the end, but poems that start out clunky never get good.

I discovered, and a judge has to conserve his strength. Some were so awkward that I stuck with them to the end out of politeness—like the poem about the difficulty of writing a poem.

I tried to keep my mind on work
And do the tasks assigned to me,
But somehow I could not shirk
The still small voice of poetry.

Through eight stanzas the poet resists the call of creativity.

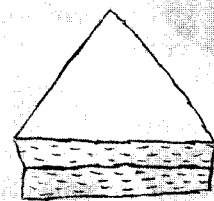
I did not want to feel the pain.
The aching longing for the sea,
The lonely music of the rain,
That comes to me through poetry.

Finally, in the last stanzas, the poet surrenders to the demands of art.

And then at last I quit the fight
And gathering up my strength somehow.
I wrote the poem I had to write,
This poem that lies before you now.

And now my poem has reached an end.
I the poet at last am free,
And now the task is yours, my friend,
To grapple with my poetry.

Many poems competed to be the worst of the lot, but it was hard to ignore a long poem titled "going to my brother's wedding reception at the min-ikahda club after seeing a documentary about rwanda," which began. "my cousins in their gleaming white tuxedos stepped over the emaciated bodies of black children and helped themselves to more watercress sandwiches/the children wailed but their wailing became a string quartet playing beatles tunes/i turned away sick with revulsion, i was covered with flies, and everyone smiled and said i had never looked better." The poet did variations on this riff for a page and a half. I imagined he was twenty years old, shy, not a good dancer, a college junior from the wealthy suburbs who felt torn between becoming a lawyer and joining the Minikahda Club and becoming a poet and hating people in the Minikahda Club. But watching a PBS documentary on starvation in Africa doesn't give you a license to feel more sensitive than all the other guys in white tuxes, and why didn't he go to Africa and get over it instead of writing a windy poem about the middle class enjoying itself on the patio?



Nonetheless, I could easily—yes, *easily*—imagine some judges who would snatch this poem out of the pile and give it the Naomi Windham Nissensen Award for Sensitivity of Greater Than Medium Length. I know people who could see the self-aggrandizing agony of the young man in the white tuxedo as quite insightful.

Teachers of creative writing who seduce their students into writing journals—yards and yards of sensitive wall-paper!

Administrators of literary programs who keep humor alarms on their desks!

Artistic politicians and commissars who insist that Literature must express the anger of oppressed people, thus forcing oppressed people to watch TV for their entertainment!

Proponents of the Pain Theory of Literature and devotees of pitiful writing—

If Flannery O'Connor were alive today, would we be taught to think of her as a Physically Challenged Writer, or could we simply read her books?

A Hispanic poet offered “Recuerdos de la Duluth,” about his experience as a little boy when he was taken out of the classroom, along with two other boys, and brought to the Anglo school nurse and sprayed for head lice. Evidently his life had been marked by this.

I have kept this secret for thirty
years.
Tried to look friendly. Wanted to be a regular guy.
But now the truth is out:
I am an alien.
I have head lice.

Never mind that spraying a boy’s head may have been the best way to treat his head lice back then—to the poet, it was an act of exclusion and oppression. What will he think after an Anglo doctor gives him his first digital prostate examination? Will it, too, symbolize his estrangement from America?

The theme of Speaking Out After Long Silence was everywhere (*I was unable to bring myself to say this until now*), accompanied by the theme of You Had to Be There to Understand (*How can you know how terrible it was/You who have never gone to the school nurse’s office?*). Hardly any poems were written for amusement, for the pleasure of language. Almost all were compelled, driven, winging up out of the poet’s maimed past—grappling with painful truths, doing battle with a world that would deny the poet’s existence.

I am me! I scream at the clouds
At the skulls under the earth
At the damnation
For too long have I kept the peace
Now I shout at everyone in the street:
I am me and without me I am nothing!

There are people in Manhattan who shout at everyone in the street and wave their arms and argue with streetlights, but would you buy a book by them?

As I read through the pile, it was easy to spot the winning poems: they were the readable ones. Some were good enough that I might have read them out loud to someone sitting nearby—the simple test of a good poem.

There was a poem called “The Bravery of Irises,” in which the poet, a woman, knelt in the flower beds and whacked away at dead stalks in the company of her husband, who seemed to be an okay guy, not a rapist or a

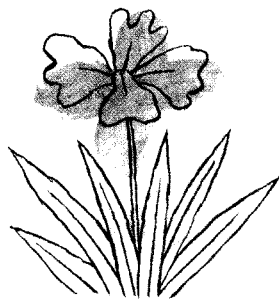
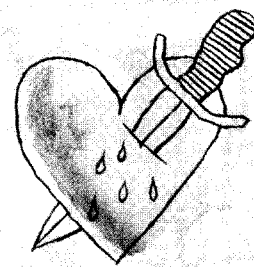


murderer, but simply a fellow gardener kneeling there too, with whom she conversed quietly about flowers and about Paris, which she hoped to see someday, though the trip had been postponed many times because they didn’t want to leave their garden. She seemed to be contented—a mood that can be hard to convey in writing without seeming smug or stupid. I thought it was a lovely poem. Like Whitman or Dickinson, this poet looked to nature as redeeming humankind from our sickness. Irises had a certain power to make her happy, and she looked back on years of iris happiness, beginning in girlhood.

Our flowers come from the rotten bones
of ancestors.
They had to die so this garden could grow.
Working in the garden is our homage to them.
The only reason to love gardening is that when you
were little,
Someone you loved loved to garden, and
You followed them around and did as they did.
And it rubbed off. My love,
We meet again in the irises, and my love,
We have been to Paris every day for forty-five years.

I put her poem in the Winner category, a thin stack next to the heap of Bad Daddy poems, in which I also put Bad Boyfriends and one Mean Mommy (“The Duchess of Revlon”). There was a small pile of poems of Homage to the Beloved, including two lesbian poems, but none by women who loved men—a

shame, if you ask me: what sort of dullard can’t get off at least one good one for her beloved? There was a stack of poems of Mute Wonder in the Woods—not fresh-squeezed wonder, unfortunately, but reconstituted (“I lie on a summer day and look at the clouds scudding across the sky/And wonder what it means/and what do the trees mean/and the birds flying south”). There was a large mound of poems about the Struggle to Be Me (“I am a myriad of sights/sounds/feelings/songs/smells all intertwined with thoughts/stories/impressions/memories and yes I am beautiful yes/and how shall I defend this/beauty/wonder/feeling/yes in this world of No”) and a handful of poems of Mute Wonder in the Presence of Death (“I held the thin transparent hand/that had peeled so many potatoes/and thought of so much to say/to that thin body with big eyes that once had been/my cousin Harriet”). There were about fifteen poems on Vietnam, all of them bloody, with mosquitoes and sweat and fear and stink in them, all of them angry



about innocence violated and lives brutalized and an uncaring nation anxious to forget.

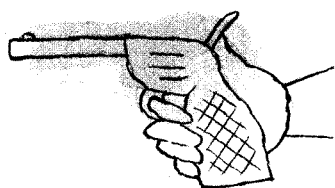
It was hard to read those poems and imagine how possibly to judge them as writing, or how the writers wished to be judged. After you have read ten Vietnam poems by ten men so haunted by the war that twenty-five years later their poems are breathless with horror, do you say, "Thank you all very much for sharing your horrors with us, and I choose horror No. 5 because the imagery is more vivid and it is better structured and more original"? These are true-life experiences, not literary pieces, and if someone tells you how he almost died when he was eighteen, how can you deny him the prize?

Experience becomes literature when it no longer matters to the reader whether the story is true or not. Stephen Crane wasn't around for the Civil War, but you don't wonder about that as you read *The Red Badge of Courage*; it's all quite real on the page. Andrew Marvell could have been a Trappist monk in Kentucky and never had a mistress, but "Had we but World enough, and Time,/This coyneess Lady were no crime" would still be a fine poem. On the other hand, if the poem "Quang Ngai, Bravo Company" ("And he raised his gun/and I thought hey cut it out/and then her head blew up/and the lieutenant turned away and puked") were written by a false veteran, born in 1962, who knew about Vietnam only from movies, you would feel cheated. The woman sorrowing for the cat who rescued her from Daddy's coldness has to be for real, or else the poem is a joke: you'd be angry

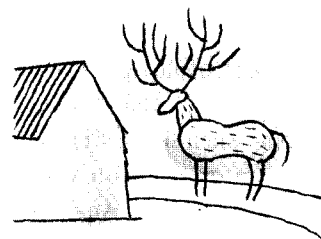
at anyone inventing a Bad Daddy, just as if someone at your AA meeting stood up and described how alcohol had destroyed his life and you later found out that the confession was pure fiction, you would shake your head in disbelief.

There was no doubt in my mind that most of the poems I read were about the poets' real lives, offered up as performances in hopes of winning a prize for the quality of their suffering, like the candidates on the old *Queen for a Day* show, who told their troubles to the genial host; audience applause determined who would get the Amana Radarange and the weekend at Lake Tahoe.

I wanted to sit the poets down in a classroom and lecture them: Self-expression is not the point of it, people! We are not here on paper in order to retail our injuries. For one thing, it is unfair to bore someone who doesn't have the opportunity to bore you right back, and for another, we have better things to do—to defend the hopeless and the down-and-out, to find humor in dreadful circumstances, to satirize the pompous and pretentious, to make deer appear suddenly in the driveway.



WRITING is a blessed life, no matter how hard it may be at times, and a person is lucky to be a writer. So go be one, I thought, having spent almost six hours reading 400 poems. There were five poems in my Winners pile. I agonized for perhaps two or three minutes over the hundreds of rejects—



*I am sorry, I mean no disrespect to Kitty.
I am glad your Grandma loved to bowl.
I am sorry for all of you poets who have been hurt by men.
I am sorry for rejecting poems that were about the moon,
which is beautiful, of course.
I am sorry for rejecting poems that were about someone
who, I am sure, is as admirable as you say.
I am sorry about your head lice, my friend.
War poets, you can have my car, my stereo, my books—
please don't come and shoot me!*

—and then I sent my nominations to the poetry-contest committee, and a few weeks later the president phoned with the results. Two of my recommendations had won prizes, but not the poem about irises.

"It was the best poem in the bunch," I said. She said that she had liked it too, but that the awards committee felt that other poems, though perhaps less advanced technically, deserved recognition. "I think we felt it was important to show that poetry isn't just about flowers," she said. The iris poem struck some people on the committee as a little boring. She mentioned that they had found "Quang Ngai, Bravo Company" particularly moving. They felt that it said things that needed to be said.

*Okay, I said to her, that's fine,
As I reached for the pistol you gave me, Daddy.
She thanked me for my work, and I said that it was my
pleasure,
As I put the pistol to the back of her head
And blew her brains out,
Which didn't amount to all that much, frankly,
And ran her through a wood chipper.
She made a little bit less than a full load.
I mixed her with the dirt
At the end of the flower bed,
And this fall I'll plant bulbs in her
And next spring she'll look better than she ever did as a
president,
And men in tuxedos will say how terrific the irises look,
But do you know what I went through
For beauty,
America,
And you on the terrace drinking your gin and tonics,
How can you possibly understand any of this, you
dummies?*

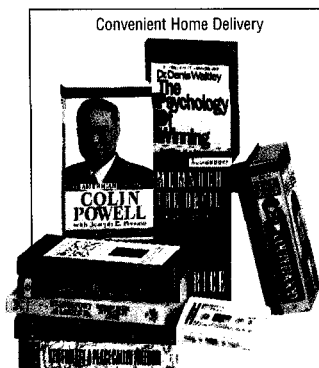
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The Precipitous World of Dan Osman

On rock with a climber who deliberately plunges from greater and greater heights

AT dawn on his thirty-second birthday the rock climber Dan Osman is poised to break the world record, his own, for a free fall from a standing structure. Using nothing more than the modified equipment of his trade, including single climbing ropes, a full-body harness, and a reinforced anchor, he will jump approximately 660 feet from a bridge in northern California.

During a safety meeting in the hours before departure for the bridge, tasks are assigned to the members of Osman's support team—in this

case fellow climbers Geoff Maliska, twenty-three, and Anthony Meeks, twenty. Precise details of the protocol and rigging are reviewed. Upon arrival at the site the three move out across the girders of the bridge, beneath the traffic, 700 feet above the valley floor. Osman rigs the elaborate anchor—a nest of nylon loops, or runners, climbing rope, and aluminum hardware—to a girder near the middle of the bridge. Leaving Meeks to watch the anchor, Osman continues with

Maliska another 160 feet across the span.

When he nears the launching point, the rope hanging slack beneath the bridge in a huge arc, Osman ties in, securing the rope to his harness. Because the fall will originate at a great lateral distance from the anchor, when Osman reaches rope's end much of the inertia will be diverted into a rocketing swing 500 feet across the valley floor. As opposed to falling directly from the anchor position, this approach keeps the initial impact—a striking whip when the rope runs out of slack—within reasonable limits.

The greatest danger in a fall of such a distance, Osman believes, is not a failure of the system, which is sound, but entanglement. The force of impact achieved at terminal velocity, he suspects, could bisect or decapitate a body wound in the 10.5-millimeter rope. To practice extricating himself from such an entanglement should it ever accidentally occur, Osman will intentionally wrap himself in the rope during his fall. Then he will uncoil and assume the correct position be-

fore impact. He will have seven seconds to do both.

Osman checks his harness and knots three times and examines his clothing for anything that might affect his fall. He looks down the rope and signals Meeks. Meeks checks the anchor and returns the signal: all clear.

Osman looks out across the valley. It is dawn. Passing cars drum intermittently overhead. There are fishermen in the river far below. He watches the movement of their rods. Their faint voices rise.

He closes his eyes and visualizes the entire sequence of his fall, dilating the seven seconds into eleven or twelve. He will execute three cartwheels. In the middle of the third he will twist his body one full turn in the rope. He will then disentangle himself—calmly, methodically, he will not thrash, he will not thrash—and extend his limbs, relaxing as he enters the point of impact. It is only when he completes the visualization that he fully comprehends the risk in what he is about to attempt. Goose bumps swarm across his skin.

Osman steps through what he calls the moment of choice. From fifteen he counts down silently, saying only the ten and the five aloud. Four, three, two, one. And then he falls.

TO climb at the edge of your ability is to fall, and climbing equipment is designed to keep those falls from causing injury or death. But on occasion the equipment fails, and the climber fails more often than that. On rope or off, it is the fear of an unchecked fall—a bone-snapping, skull-crushing fall—that nags most climbers, holds them back, thwarts their inspiration.

In 1989, while attempting a new route on a difficult overhanging face, Osman fell. Again and again, protected by the rope, he fell. He decided then that it would be not in climbing but in falling that he would embrace his fear—bathe in it, as he says, and move beyond it. He began to fall on purpose, from greater and greater heights. Osman's comfort and performance on the rock have improved accordingly.

Above, Osman preparing to fall from Cave Rock, on Lake Tahoe

As a boy, I spent many unwise hours climbing with friends on Hook Mountain, in Rockland County, New York. The Hook is a geological appendage of the Palisades, which run like a curtain along the western bank of the Hudson River north of the George Washington Bridge. We climbed with little more in the way of equipment than canvas basketball shoes, cutoffs, and Yankees caps, and the degenerate rock came out in fistfuls as we ascended.

We continued north on bikes along the river, past Haverstraw to the Bear Mountain Bridge. We skidded down the steep embankment from the road to walk across the girders underneath the bridge. We trotted and then jogged back and forth across the gray-green rivet-studded beams, each one twelve or fifteen inches wide, leaning into gusts of wind to keep our balance several hundred feet above the rocks along the river's eastern shore.

In the dozen or so years that intervene I have dabbled in the media of ice and rock. I have crossed glaciers in the North Cascades, climbed in the Rockies and Shawangunks, bouldered in Fontainebleau and Joshua Tree. But by Osman's standards I know the vertical world only vaguely. Beside the likes of him I am not even a climber. In the cheerfully unminced words of Geoff Maliska, I am a flatlander. I came to Lake Tahoe to meet Dan Osman, to watch him climb and fall, and finally, with his guidance, to take an introductory plunge.

A ROPE lies loosely gathered at the base of a decomposing granite outcropping south of Lake Tahoe known as The Pie Shop. Unwinding from its center, the rope follows the ravine between two stones, rises through the shivering branches of a manzanita bush, and moves up the granite face. The rope, 8.8 millimeters in diameter, is diamondbacked in fluorescent orange, yellow, and green. In the windless silence the friction of its passage across the stone produces an amplified hiss that ebbs and swells in rhythm with the progress of the climber above.

Despite the rope attached to his harness, Osman is free-soloing the 165-foot climb. That is to say, he is climbing unprotected by the rope, and any fall will send him to the earth. He is merely carrying the rope to the top of the outcropping

for a later, more difficult climb. The route he follows is called Earn Your Wings.

Osman is lithe and under six feet tall. His dark hair, long enough to cover his shoulder blades, is bound in a ponytail. In the 1890s Osman's paternal great-grandfather, a descendant of samurai families in the Takeuchi clan, emigrated to Hawaii from the mountainous Iwakuni region of Japan. Takeuchi was shot and killed in 1919 on a sugar plantation while attempting to disarm a fellow laborer who was preparing to assassinate their foreman. As a boy, Osman was trained in the samurai ethic of bushido by his father, Les Osman, a veteran police officer. The young Osman studied aikido and, later, kung fu.

Climbers speak often of elegance—elegance of climbing style, elegance of route. And it is undeniable that climbing without rope is more elegant than climbing roped, just as climbing roped but mechanically unaided is more elegant than gadgeting skyward with ascenders and rope ladders, called *étriers*. The catch of free-soloing, and its appeal, is the simplicity of its demand: one cannot fall. Like the kendo practitioner who lays aside his wooden sword to duel in earnest with live blades, the free-soloist—in freeing himself or herself from the rope on routes where falling is tantamount to death—becomes a kind of mystic.

In preparation for a particularly difficult solo Osman will climb the route several times on rope, repeating the crux, or most difficult move, until he is certain he can execute the climb without error. "Then I start breathing," he explains, "to get the *ki* down into my *hara*."

Loosely translated from the Japanese as "vital energy," *ki* is to the martial artist as harmony is to the musician. The *hara* (literally, "belly"), a point in the abdomen below the navel, is held to be the center and source of physical energy—a reservoir of sorts in which *ki*, largely through breath control, may be pooled and from which it may be directed.

"I visualize a screen," Osman continues, "a steel filter that I lower with my breaths to keep the positive energy and let the negative energy escape. All the fear I allow to escape." When he is centered—a process that takes from five to twenty minutes—he is ready to climb. "I feel the air pressure," he says. "The *ki* is very concentrated, very strong. I feel the gravity more. When I step onto the rock,

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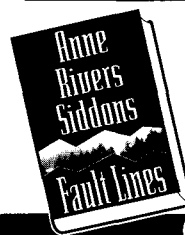
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my senses immediately sharpen. The taste in my mouth becomes vivid."

Although Earn Your Wings is no challenge for a climber of his ability, Osman appears to spare nothing. His pace is unhurried. The expression on his face is a void. Even on large, secure holds, the placements of his hands and feet—the latter tightly shod in pale-blue red-laced black-soled rock shoes—are unerringly precise. Without interrupting the liquid flow of his movement he seems to consider each hold as if preparing to catch the raised head of an asp. When he makes

ters *a* through *d*. The difference between a 5.12d and a 5.13a is often subtle and sometimes a matter of debate. The difference indicated by a full numerical subdivision, however, is substantial; dedicated climbers can spend months or even years advancing from 5.10 to 5.11, from 5.11 to 5.12. Earn Your Wings is a 5.9. Arguably the most difficult free climb in the world as of this writing—infamous for its dynamic one-finger moves—is Action Directe, 5.14d, in Germany, which was established, or "placed," by the late Wolfgang Güllich. Güllich, a legendary climb-



Free-soloing the route Fire in the Hole, on the roof of the Cave

his placement, it is final. There is no shuffle, no grope. For all his fluidity there is an awesome mechanical beat to his progress. Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. He seems to climb within a field generated by the concentration of his will.

Climbs are rated according to a numeric class system devised by Sierra Club mountaineers in the 1930s. From Class 1, walking, and Class 2, scrambling, the rating mounts to difficult free climbing (mechanically protected—unless soloing—but unaided) at Class 5, and concludes with aid climbing (mechanically assisted in resting and ascent) at Class 6. Class 5 is subdivided with a second set of numbers, which is further nuanced by pluses or minuses (5.8+) or even more precisely, on climbs of 5.10 and above, with the let-

er, died in an accident on the autobahn in 1992 at the age of thirty-one.

With the encouragement of his mother, Sharon Burks, a horse trainer and two-time world-champion barrel racer (the barrel race is a rodeo event involving agile horses, standing barrels, and figure eights), Osman began climbing at age twelve. Despite his evident talent, he describes himself as a slow developer, having taken eight years to break through to 5.12.

Osman completes Earn Your Wings and proceeds to solo a short piece of his own design: Funky Cold Medina, 5.10a, a corner overhanging 160 feet of air.

A difficult route can take months for a climber to place. The completed route is christened and rated by its author. Subsequent climbers will confirm or challenge the rating (climbs are often downgraded as climbers work out easier sequences over time), and soon the route will appear,

immortalized, in local climbing guides.

Osman takes immense care in the creation of his routes, his greatest satisfaction being praise from other climbers for the spare beauty of his "lines." He regards each climb as a monument, not only to its creator but also to the climbers of generations past who attempted the route unsuccessfully—with equal boldness but inferior technology—and to those who follow and attempt the route.

From Funky Cold Medina, Osman continues to another of his creations, Buttons of Gold, 5.9+, named for the tawny nipples of rock that serve as holds. He then moves through the boulders that crown the broad-backed outcropping, executing short, powerful sequences on overhangs an arm's length from the ground. He leaps from stone to stone.

Carrying the coiled rope over his shoulder, Osman crosses to the eastern prow of the outcropping, stepping lightly in his rock shoes over beards of crusted snow. He drops down into a notch and emerges beneath and to the side of a swollen bulge of granite that droops over the vertical rock face like the cap of an enormous mushroom. A horizontal crack, centimeters to inches in width, runs laterally forty feet along the joint between the bulge and the face, and curves obliquely around the rock to disappear. From this crack a climber who fell unchecked would travel 280 feet to the ground, glancing once off a sloping ledge midway.

Osman anchors the rope, ties in, and whitens both sides of his hands with powdered gymnastic chalk from a pouch at his waist. The chalk marginally protects the hands and keeps them dry of sweat.

The climb is Blood in My Chalk Bag, 5.11c/d. Squatting on a ledge near the beginning of the route, Meeks will serve as Osman's belayer, feeding the rope through a device that will help him brace any fall that occurs.

Osman grimaces faintly, nagged by three recently broken ribs (snowboard, tree), and stretches his torso. He slowly releases a breath and begins his passage horizontally along the crack.

The footholds on the face below the crack are meager. Most of Osman's weight, in a technique known as smearing, is supported by the friction of his sticky rubber soles against the texture of the vertical granite. He carefully jams his left hand deep into the crack. With his

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right he unclips a Friend—a spring-loaded camming device—from a loop on his harness. Holding the device like a depressed syringe, he inserts the head into the section of the crack best suited to its width. When he releases the trigger, the opposing cams, or curved wedges, expand and seize the rock with metal teeth. He tests the piece with a tug, clips his rope into the carabiner that dangles from the Friend by a nylon loop, and continues. The carabiner is an oblong ring of aluminum alloy about the length of an avocado and equipped with a spring-loaded gate. A semantic cousin of Italy's enduring *carabiniere*, the carabiner, ubiquitous in climbing, was originally invented to clip carbine rifles to bandoliers. A climbing carabiner's minimum breaking strength in the direction of its long axis is about 4,400 pounds.

While still well below the limit of Osman's ability, Blood in My Chalk Bag is rigorous. In contrast to his style on Earn Your Wings, Osman's execution here is simian, dynamic, a display of tenacity and brute strength. Some of his positions appear awkward, out of balance, but he is climbing as the route demands. With his right hand and right foot jammed in the crack, Osman pauses briefly, hangs to rest, slackens his opposing limbs. Soon he vanishes around the bulge and finishes the climb.

Meeks, whom Osman has known for less than a week, decides to follow, cleaning the route of its protection as he goes. Osman will belay from the same ledge. Meeks is soon in trouble. Although he is skilled on faces, his crack technique is no match for the route. His progress is painstaking. Osman coaches, move by move. The light fails in the snow-dusted valley below. The temperature drops. A Friend resists extraction. Meeks wrestles with the recalcitrant piece, swears at it, and finally falls. Osman braces and holds Meeks in place. Meeks hangs on the protection and rests. The darkness deepens. Placing another device beside it to relieve his weight, Meeks finally gets the Friend out and continues. He finishes the climb and appears on the crest of the bulge, silhouetted against the dying sky.

Osman is not his teacher, but the role is unavoidable given the discrepancy in age and skill. Coiling the rope, he praises Meeks's effort but gently reprimands him for not being entirely honest with himself

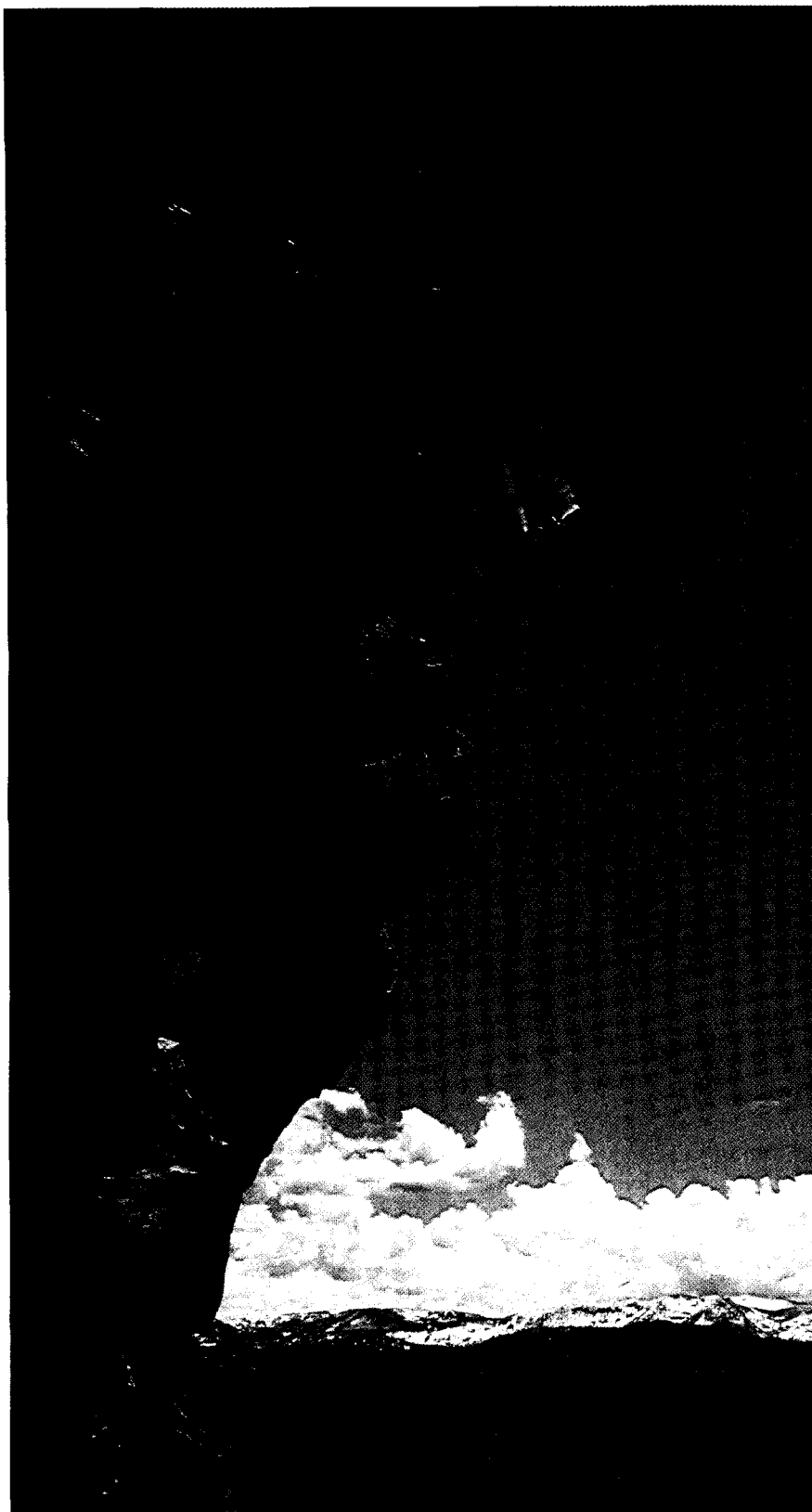
or with Osman about his skill in relation to the route, the time, and the conditions. Meeks nods, visibly abashed. In the silence that follows, he holds out his hands as if examining a manicure. He looks thoughtfully at the blood-spotted chalk on his knuckles and smiles with pride.

THE following morning Osman and company appear out of the mist at Cave Rock. The Cave, as it is known, is an ominous and nobly situated vault—like half of a cathedral's dome—hewn by erosion from the andesite cliff far above the fog-swept eastern shoreline of Lake Tahoe. It is the kind of cave, were it found in the Aegean, in which Olympian divinities might have been born.

Osman ties in to the rope and steps from the gravel floor onto the wall of the cave. With the delicacy of a watchmaker and the strength of a longshoreman he climbs up and out across the arching roof, his back to the ground. Maliska belays from the ground. The route Osman follows is his own: Phantom Lord, 5.13c. He has crafted more technically demanding climbs, like the adjacent Slayer, 5.13d/14a (a route praised by Wolfgang Güllich as the most elegant he'd ever seen), but none rivals Phantom Lord for boldness.

Arriving at the end of the underside of the seventy-foot overhang, Osman rounds the lip of the cave's roof and continues up the cliffside's natural contour. In ten moves he is at the anchor: a steel ring, or "hanger," bolted to the rock. He has finished the route and for a moment rests. Then he prepares to fall.

Balanced on the cliff, he calls for slack. Maliska feeds the rope while Osman lowers it in a long loop between his harness and the last piece of protection near the lip. The length of slack will be the distance of Osman's free fall: sixty-five feet. Maliska secures the rope in the belaying device on his own harness. Thus attached, he will serve as Osman's counterweight through the fulcrum of the anchor overhead. Upon Osman's impact on the rope, Maliska will spring in the direction of the pull. The force of the fall will pluck him a short distance into the air. An inflexible, or "static," belay would rob Osman of the necessary give and catapult him in and up against the cavern's jagged roof at a speed approaching sixty miles an hour. The error of a static belay has already



Osman plunges toward Lake Tahoe, a hundred feet below, leaving a trail of gymnastic chalk

been made: another belayer of Osman's leaned back instinctively to brace a similar but accidental fall. The resulting impact broke both of Osman's ankles.

Osman careens out away from the cliff and plummets earthward, limbs flung wide. He completes two cartwheels,

swings gracefully into the lower recesses of the cave, and swoops back out into space. Maliska hangs in his harness, legs braced against the wall, twelve feet above the gravel floor.

In the process of perfecting such a fall Osman has done more than simply grap-

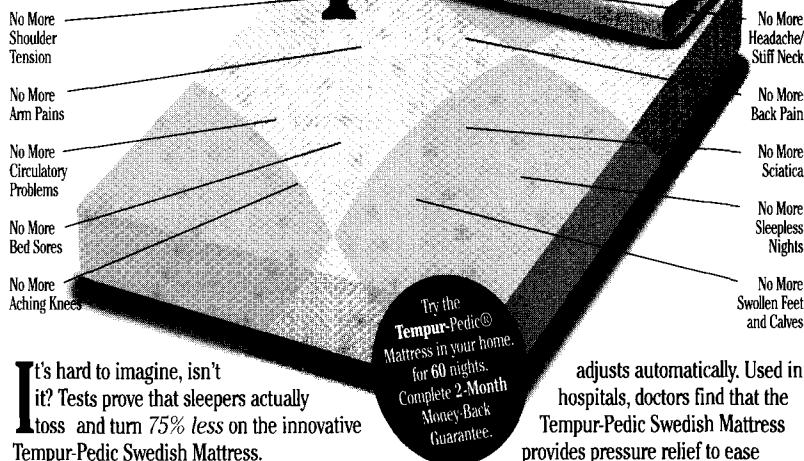
ple with his fears. By greatly exaggerating the conditions of normal climbing falls, he has in five years gathered enough data potentially to revolutionize the technology and application of climbing protection. He is currently designing or modifying equipment, including protection and belaying devices, and developing techniques—including body positioning before and during impact on the rope—to improve the safety of long climbing falls. His work will certainly prevent injuries, and may save lives on the rock.

But there are costs. In May of 1994 Bobby Tarver, a twenty-five-year-old bungee jumper in Osman's circle of close friends, was killed replicating one of Osman's falls. Unable to accompany Tarver to the site, Osman first attempted to forestall him and then precisely diagrammed the fall. Tarver was impatient. "You could see it in his eyes," Osman says. "He was looking at the paper but he wasn't listening." Tarver proceeded to a bridge that spans a Utah canyon, failed to execute a simple preliminary step, and fell 250 feet to strike the canyon wall. Dangling from the bridge, he was recovered by his companions. He regained consciousness briefly and died three hours later.

Osman has returned to that bridge on several occasions since the accident, three times to jump. Twice he retreated. He finally descended into the canyon and spoke with Tarver, as he put it. He then remounted the bridge, ignored technical refinements made since the tragedy, and jumped according to the plan he diagrammed that morning in May.

AT the time of my visit Osman lived alone in a warm, sepulchral studio 200 yards from the shore of Lake Tahoe. The bed, couch, chair, and table in the main room abutted like puzzle pieces. Along one wall stood a workbench layered with climbing hardware: camming devices, chocks, carabiners, ice axes, snowshoes, crampons, a red helmet. A rope lay coiled over a vise. Propped against an electric-guitar amplifier was a red-and-yellow backpack, a prototype of Osman's design for The North Face, a prominent outdoor-equipment manufacturer. Two snowboards leaned in the cor-

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ner by the door. There was a small television and an ample collection of rock-climbing videos. Seven or eight books stood on a bedside table, all of them concerned with Japanese history and the samurai, including an epic novel about the life of Musashi, James Clavell's *Shogun*, and *The Samurai Sword—A Handbook*. Photographs of Osman's daughter, Emma, age eight (now living with her mother), were visible from every angle in the apartment. On the walls were posters, a balance of heavy-metal bands—notably Metallica—and climbers on varying terrain. Twice appearing was Lynn Hill, a groundbreaking climber now working at the top of her form. Osman cited Hill, along with the prominent alpinist and photographer Jay Smith, Wolfgang Güllich, and the legendary soloist John Bachar (pronounced *Backer*), as exemplars.

From beneath his bed Osman reverently withdrew a Japanese long sword, or *katana*, its curved scabbard covered in blackened sharkskin. The sword's hilt was veneered with the dimpled ivory hide of a stingray and bound in a lattice of burnt-orange silk. Four centuries old, the blade was nicked and smudged in places by corrosion. The sword had certainly seen use.

Returning from the Pacific with a U.S. serviceman, the weapon came into the hands of Osman's father in exchange for a shotgun. Les Osman presented the *katana* to his son in an informal ceremony on Thanksgiving Day, 1994. Considering himself undeserving, the younger Osman attempted to decline it.

"He had earned the right to have possession of the sword," Les Osman, once skeptical of his son's vocation, now recalls. "Doing the work that I do, I have faced death many, many, many times. When it's over, you celebrate the fact that you're alive, you celebrate the fact that you have a family, you celebrate the fact that you can breathe. Everything, for a few instants, seems sweeter, brighter, louder. And I think this young man has reached a point where his awareness of life and living are far beyond what I could ever achieve."

ON the day of my scheduled fall I wake at four in the morning in the excessive heat of a motel room in State-line, California, and see Tarver hanging

from a rope in the middle of the Utah canyon.

Hours later I remain uncommitted as I stand at the edge of the overhanging cliff across the road from Cave Rock, far above the boulders on the shore of Lake Tahoe. At a lateral distance from the anchor, I am attached to the cliff by a slender hanging arc of nylon.

Earlier, in the car, I suggested the possibility of a second rope, a backup, should one fail. "You could do that," Osman answered. He reflected, weighing his words. "But . . . that's not really what it's



Osman with the gear he uses to set anchors for his falls

about." He seemed to object to my suggestion not in judgment of my cowardice, which his expression seemed to say was my affair, but in defense of ritual. As if, because he knows a second rope to be superfluous, the aesthetic, and thus the spirit, of my jump would be defiled.

A thin layer of mist hangs like a belt above the western shore, bisecting the snow-covered peaks that rise beyond. The lake is vast, an inland sea.

Osman points. "Do you see the rock that looks like a skull?" The large stone is pale, ninety-five feet directly below, the sockets and mouth implied by dark patches of lichen. "That is your landing zone," he says. "Step off and aim for that rock."

"Whatever you do," he continues, "don't jump out. Don't jump out. Don't jump out. If you do, you may swing into the cliff."

I ask Osman to check the anchor. I doubt the wisdom of this. I question my motives. I question the technology involved. For some reason I do not question Osman. He climbs up, checks the anchor, returns. I feel impelled to thank him, to shake his hand. I continue to breathe. I stand facing the anchor, the outside of my right foot flush with the edge of the precipice.

In a mutation so swift as to be imperceptible, as if externally compelled, I pass irreversibly through Osman's moment of choice. In the attenuated heartbeats between the moment of commitment and the moment of execution, the pooling fear distills, climaxes, and transmutes. The body, suddenly unbound, becomes weightless, soaring in its position on the rock. The back straightens; the head instinctively rises to the sky. A deep, luxurious passivity suffuses the limbs. I have gained no stronger confidence in the equipment. I have in no way lost the visceral suspicion that I may soon lie mangled on the rocks below. I have simply been relieved of my command.

I count to three and step off the cliff. The sensation of the fall begins at once, without the anticipated poise in space. The shoreline within range of my peripheral vision vaults skyward. The cliffside smears into a blur. The acceleration exceeds all expectation. No dream fall, no gently arcing adolescent cannonball from a high board, has prepared me for the rate of my descent. I am not falling; I have been hurled—spiked, perhaps—with celestial gusto from the sky. I lock my eyes on the skull between my feet. There is a last spasm of panic, a final lashing of the dormant will.

The free fall lasts little longer than two seconds, a mere thirty-five to forty feet before the slack is out. The tension on the harness pulls me gently from my course, directs me south into a long swing of 200 feet, parallel to the overhanging cliff. I shout obscenely. The sky is full of angels.

From across my shoulder I uncoil the remainder of the rope and let it fall. My hands tremble as I descend the rope, still swinging, to the shore. I finally alight and stand upon the stones, freeing the anchor of my weight. Dan Osman calls triumphantly from high upon the cliff. I accepted his temptation. I leaped from the precipice and was upheld. ☸

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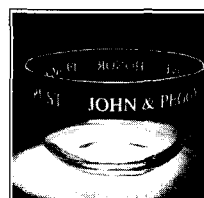


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INFINITE JEST

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AMONG writers of the younger—which these days means under forty—generation, David Foster Wallace has a reputation as a wild-card savant. A fictioneer and former Harvard philosophy student, Wallace is the author of *The Broom of the System*, a novel; *Girl With Curious Hair*, an envelope-stretch-

form of endnotes); this, mind you, in an era when publishers express very real doubts about whether the younger generation—presumably a good part of Wallace's target audience—reads at all.

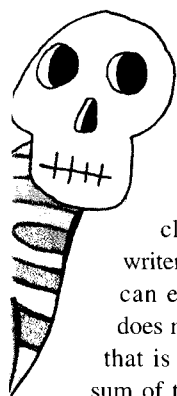
Infinite Jest. What is it, and where has it come from? Let me try the second question first. About four years ago Wallace published a vividly idiosyncratic autobiographical essay in *Harper's*. "Tennis, Trigonometry, Tornadoes"

gave an account of the author's youthful obsession with tennis and also conjured an intriguing metaphysics, bringing together the grid of the court, the larger grid of the Illinois farm country where Wallace grew up, and the vagaries of the mighty

ing book of stories; and, with Mark Costello, a nonfiction work, *Signifying Rappers: Rap and Race in the Urban Present*. He has also done some hard schooling in halfway houses and recovery programs (a fact not irrelevant to the novel under review). His latest offering, *Infinite Jest*, has been moving toward us like an ocean disturbance, pushing increasingly hyperbolic rumors before it: that the author could not stop writing; that the publisher was begging for cuts of hundreds of pages; that it was, qua novel, a very strange piece of business altogether. Now it's here and, yes, it is strange, not just in its radically cantilevered plot conception but also in its size (more than a thousand pages, one tenth of that bulk taking the



weather systems that move like free will through those precincts of determinism. "Between the ages of twelve and fifteen," Wallace wrote, "I was a near great junior tennis player. . . . At fourteen I was ranked seventeenth in the United States Tennis Association's Western Section . . ." Later he recalled his intensely rivalrous friendship with one Gil Antitoui, the son of a professor of Québécois history. Details, details—but it is sometimes by way of details and their transformation that we understand a bit more about the alchemist's retort that is the writer's imagination. How else to get a purchase on this work? It is as thick with narrative stuff as any novel in recent memory, but it has axial strands involving Enfield, a tennis academy outside Boston; Ennet House, a residence for recovering substance abusers; and a fantastical conspiracy tale featuring Québécois-separatist terrorists and, not insignificantly, a Cambridge storefront owned by the brothers Antitoui.



Get it? I'm not sure "get it" is the point here, really. I could lay out a full half dozen other major plot elements and the big picture would still not begin to come clear. You see, in this young writer's vision the big picture, if we can even speak of such a thing, does not have a "clear" to come to: that is part of what the whole, the sum of the parts, is saying about the world, about reality. Wallace is scrabbling along the high-terrain paths earlier explored by Thomas Pynchon and William Gaddis. Indeed, not only does he share with both a mordantly black view of modern and late-modern experience, but he also has a penchant for weaving long braids from enticingly antiphonal plots, each of which is differently absorbing, if not for its characterizations or imaginative brio then for the sharp snap of its thought, the obsessiveness of its informational reference (hence the notes), or—and—the incandescence of the writing.

Wallace's particular conceit in *Infinite Jest* is that the events described are taking place in the indeterminate future, possibly several decades hence. Some features are familiar, while others have an ominous or spoofy futuristic cast. Wallace is not afraid to commingle various tonal and thematic registers. Against the more credible psy-

chological travails of the central characters he sets past-tense references to the Limbaugh presidency and descriptions of the "Great Concavity," a large area of New England that has been ceded to Canada and yet is used as a dumping ground (gigantic catapults near Boston send canisters of trash and toxins arcing thither).

BUT these more outré materials combine to form what is finally a thematic second tier. The foreground of *Infinite Jest* features three basic plot systems. At the center of one is Hal Incandenza, an adolescent tennis star attending Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA), which his family founded, and which has been administered by his mother and uncle since his father, James, who was also an experimental filmmaker, ended things by putting his head in a specially rigged microwave oven. Hal, who is compulsive and brilliant, shows his damage obliquely: he cannot walk the orthogonal paths of ETA with an unaltered mind. "Hal likes to get high in secret," we read, "but a bigger secret is that he's as attached to the secrecy as he is to getting high." An intriguing filtering presence, and a fine departure point for Wallace's various divagations into Incandenza family lore, Hal does not himself do much besides play tennis and, late in the book, try to stop smoking pot.

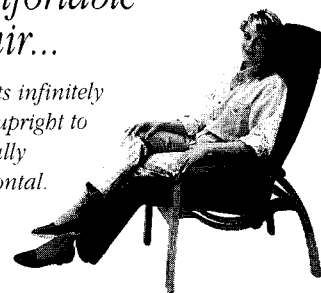
Then there is the world of Don Gately. Gately is a former drug abuser and breaking-and-entering artist who made the bad mistake of going after an assistant D.A. who once caused him to do some time. After invading the man's home, Gately sent him

two high-pixel Polaroid snapshots, one of big Don Gately and one of his associate, each in a Halloween mask denoting a clown's great good professional cheer, each with his pants down and bent over and each with the enhanced-focus handle of one of the couple's toothbrushes protruding from his bottom.

The photos came, of course, after husband and wife had had ample time to carry out their hygienic rituals; the A.D.A.'s wife became, alas, unhinged. Now, hiding out at Ennet House, trying to go straight (indeed, finding in himself a reservoir of saintly impulses), Gately lives in daily dread of being found by the vengeful A.D.A. He performs his menial tasks, goes to meetings, interacts with the

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other Ennet denizens. Again, little happens in the way of conventional plot.

Infinite Jest comes, in time, to seem like some great clattering vehicle that is powered by a rudimentary three-stroke engine, the narrative passing in steady sequence from Enfield to Ennet to a plateau lookout in the Southwest where two Québécois-separatist agents are having a secret rendezvous, trying to determine how their people might get hold of a particular "cartridge," or film cassette. The film, the eponymous *Infinite Jest*, was made by James Incandenza and has the terrifying capacity to send anyone who views it into a crazed state of fixation that quickly leads to death. Why or how this should be is never made clear, nor do we expect it to be.

Each of the narrative sections has its own compelling dynamic, often against the odds. Why read countless pages detailing the Byzantine logistics of daily tennis drills? Because, for one thing, Wallace's writing is edgy, accurate, and darkly witty.

Here is how to don red and gray E.T.A. sweats and squad-jog a weekly 40 km. up and down urban Commonwealth Avenue even though you would rather set your hair on fire than jog in a pack. Jogging is painful and pointless, but you are not in charge. Your brother gets to ride shotgun while a senile German blows BBs at your legs both of them laughing and screaming *Schnell*.

Though nothing much happens at Enfield, our prolonged exposure to the academy system reveals the terrible repressions that keep everything in its place. This is a game world, a closed system, but the idea of play has been pumped out of it, and the remaining husk is but a slight barrier against the manic forces at large in the world. These are conjured for us through countless vignettes: of the awful unraveling of Hal's father; of the brittle poise and warped lusts of his mother, Avril; of the desperado backgrounds of the Ennet residents, not least the self-immolating habits of the younger Don Gately.

Gately, like his housemates, is at once sick and arrestingly vulnerable—and more human than the competitive automatons being groomed at nearby ETA. When tenderness and conscience announce themselves in the soul of a thug, we cannot but be moved. So, too, we have

to smile at the fumbling steps he takes on his way to true self-reconstruction.

He had nothing in the way of a like God-concept, and at that point maybe even less than nothing in terms of interest in the whole thing; he treated prayer like setting an oven-temp according to a box's direction. Thinking of it as talking to the ceiling was somehow preferable to imagining talking to Nothing. And he found it embarrassing to get down on his knees in his underwear, and like the other guys in the room he always pretended his sneakers were like way under the bed and he had to stay down there a while to find them and get them out, when he prayed, but he did it . . .

STROKE, stroke, stroke—over a distance of hundreds of pages. Readers either drop out (some will) or push on, lured by the interest of the idiosyncratic prose itself, but also by curiosity and some fundamental incredulity. The denizens of these worlds are so far removed from one another—tennis brats, recovering drugies, Québécois separatists—that the author will *have* to turn magician. Surely the hankies he has tucked into various pockets will cascade forth in a riotous splurge of color. But no. Even though signs of linkage start to proliferate, and even though a fascinating bridge between worlds is created through the trajectory of one Joelle van Dyne (a former girlfriend of Hal's older brother, and perhaps of his father, too; the star of the film *Infinite Jest*; a suicidal cokehead who comes to Ennet and takes a shine to Gately), the plot lines do not come to apocalyptic or even transfiguring intersection. Whatever aesthetics we espouse, we are all closet traditionalists in our expectations—and these must be shelved. Wallace rebuts the prime-time formula. Think Beckett, think Pynchon, think Gaddis. Think.

Wallace has, in interviews, scourged himself, admitting to "devoting a lot of energy to creating expectations and then taking pleasure in disappointing them" (as noted). But the artistic intent in *Infinite Jest* overrides such considerations, or at least places them in perspective. Wallace is, clearly, bent on taking the next step in fiction. He is carrying on the Pynchonian celebration of the renegade spirit in a world gone as flat as a circuit board; he is tailoring that richly comic idiom for its

new-millennial uses. To say that the novel does not obey traditional norms is to miss the point. Wallace's narrative structure should be seen instead as a response to an altered cultural sensibility. The book mimes, in its movements as well as in its dense loads of referential data, the distributed systems that are the new paradigm in communications. The book is not *about* electronic culture, but it has internalized some of the decentering energies that computer technologies have released into our midst. The plot is webbed, branched, rife with linkages. This could be a liability. If Hal were effectively the protagonist (as we first imagine he will be), he would not generate binding energy sufficient to counteract the diffusion. But the emergent figure of Gately—wounded, desperate, but able to find and give love—allows *Infinite Jest* to work as a postmodern saga of damnation and salvation. The novel is confusing, yes, and maddening in myriad ways. It is also resourceful, hilarious, intelligent, and unique. Those who stay with it will find the whole world lit up as though by black light. ☛

A Gift for Dialogue

by Dennis Drabelle

FIVE SCREENPLAYS BY PRESTON STURGES

edited by Brian Henderson.
University of California Press,
848 pages, \$50.00/\$25.00.

FOUR MORE SCREENPLAYS BY PRESTON STURGES

edited by Brian Henderson.
University of California Press,
975 pages, \$60.00/\$35.00.

"AT the present writing, what with throwing away stuff I haven't liked, I have about forty pages of shooting script," Preston Sturges wrote to an anxious Darryl F. Zanuck in 1947. "This need not alarm you as I spritz dialogue like Seltzer water once I know where I'm going."

What that claim lacked in diffidence, it made up for in deadeye truth. Preston

Sturges spritzed some of the best dialogue ever written for American movies. He could be slangy: in *Easy Living* (1937), Ray Milland urges Jean Arthur to steal food from a busted Automat window in snappy vernacular, saying, "Don't be a sucker, sister. That beef pie is a wow." He could be high-toned: in *Unfaithfully Yours*, Rex Harrison rages haughtily at a suspicious Rudy Vallee, "You dare to inform me you had vulgar footpads in snap brim fedoras sluicing after my beautiful wife?" (Harrison gets a comeuppance when it's pointed out that what he meant was "flatfoots" and "sleuthing," not "footpads" and "sluicing." And soon *he's* suspicious too.)

But these are one-liners. Sturges's real flair was for spiraling exchanges between two or more characters, which typically run too long to print here: cardsharp Barbara Stanwyck's ensnarement of naive heir Henry Fonda in *The Lady Eve*, for example, or the opening of *Sullivan's Travels*, in which movie director Joel McCrea confounds his studio bosses with the bombshell that he's through making comedies and wants to get serious. Nothing quite like these verbal volleys has been heard before or since.

During his wonder years, from 1940 to 1944, Sturges applied his gift for dialogue—along with his skills as a director and a producer—to the flagging genre of romantic comedy, which he almost singlehandedly sustained with *Christmas in July*, *The Lady Eve*, *Sullivan's Travels*, *The Palm Beach Story*, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*, and *Hail the Conquering Hero*. (In the midst of these came *The Great Moment*, a structurally innovative biopic about the man who introduced ether as a surgical anesthetic.) Together with *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948), they constitute an unrivaled burst of Hollywood creativity—movies that are caustic, boisterous, tumultuous, naughty, witty, and laced with surprising tomfoolery by actors who had rarely excelled in film comedy before (Fonda, Stanwyck, McCrea, Harrison, Vallee, and Mary Astor), not to mention crack supporting work by a stable of character players. On the strength of this period Sturges belongs with the great writer-directors, the true auteurs: the likes of Chaplin, Keaton, and Bergman.

What distinguishes him from the others, though, is the unlikely path he took to become a director. He started out as a

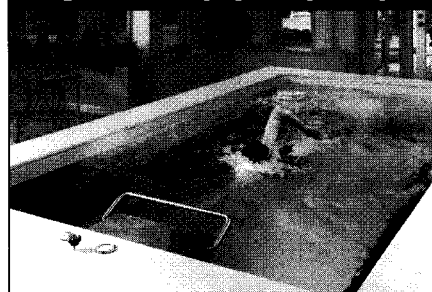
Hollywood screenwriter. The industry has long since grown accustomed to writers-turned-directors: John Huston, Billy Wilder, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Lawrence Kasdan, and Nora Ephron, to name just a few. But before Sturges one has to go back to the silent era to find any. In the interim the studio system had pigeonholed employees, expecting them to stay in their places and be fruitful. Not only did Sturges trade his typewriter for a megaphone but he helped Wilder, a Paramount colleague, make the same switch.

Sturges had come to Hollywood from Broadway early in the talkie era, and spent most of the 1930s supplying scripts to contract directors. Among the movies made from these are three comedies that can hold their own with the later, all-Sturges works—*The Good Fairy*, *Easy Living*, and *Remember the Night*—and a drama, *The Power and the Glory*, whose flashback-driven narration was a prototype for Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. Though lavishly paid (at his peak he was earning \$3,250 a week), Sturges chafed when the studios doctored and cut his scripts. He kept running up against the kind of maddening circularity that squelches talented aspirants everywhere: despite his brilliance and knowledge of the medium, nobody would let him direct because nobody *else* had let him direct.

In 1939 Paramount finally gave him a try, with his script for *The Great McGinty*, the story of a onetime vagrant who gets elected governor of his state. The early rushes looked so promising that when Sturges came down with pneumonia, the studio refrained from handing the project to another director and waited for him to get well. The film was a hit, and Sturges won an Oscar for its screenplay. He found he didn't merely like directing; he "reveled" in it. With a trunkful of draft scripts and embryonic ideas to draw upon, he was off on his five-year roll.

When the University of California Press brought out *Five Screenplays by Preston Sturges*, in 1985, it was redressing neglect and trying to endow posterity. To see a Sturges movie at the time, one almost had to live in a city with an "art-house cinema," and even then, of course, one was dependent on its programmer's whims. Film preservation was underfunded. Against the possibility of losing Sturges films to obscurity and decay, prudence called for at least disseminating their scripts.

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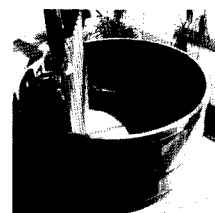
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The intervening decade has witnessed a Sturges revival, with film-society retrospectives of his work and the publication of a critical biography by Diane Jacobs (*Christmas in July: The Life and Art of Preston Sturges*). The case for Sturges has also been made in stylish books by James Harvey (*Romantic Comedy in Hollywood From Lubitsch to Sturges*) and Elizabeth Kendall (*The Runaway Bride: Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1930s*). Repertory cinemas have all but vanished, but most of the movies Sturges wrote and directed are now available on video. The cable channel American Movie Classics regularly broadcasts the vintage output of Paramount and Twentieth Century-Fox, with the result that televised showings of Sturges films have become commonplace.

Meanwhile, that first book of screenplays has gone into a second hardcover printing and a paperback edition. If the new volume, *Four More Screenplays by Preston Sturges*, is arriving with less urgency, it is still welcome—a bonanza for scholars and a kickshaw for buffs.

SOME critics and biographers of Sturges depict him as caught between the artistic leanings nurtured by his self-indulgent mother and an urge toward success inspired by his bourgeois adoptive father. It's true that he was familiar with both ways of life: almost from his birth, in 1898, he had a divided childhood. His mother, née Mary Dempsey, changed her name to Mary Desti in the interests of bon ton, fled with little Preston to Europe for as much of each year as she could manage, and cultivated artistes. She became best friends with the bohemian dancer Isadora Duncan, in whose death Desti played an unwitting part. She had given Duncan the red shawl that the dancer was wearing as she settled into a sports car in 1927. While Desti looked on helplessly, fringe on the shawl got caught in a wheel as the car began to move; the yank broke Duncan's neck.

If Edith Wharton had written farce, she might have created a heroine like Desti, who had her share of triumphs; she started an intermittently successful cosmetics business and married money several times, in more than one currency. But she embroidered her life with fantasies. "She was . . . endowed with such a rich and powerful imagination," Sturges wrote, "that anything she had said three times,

she believed fervently. Often twice was enough." In a fog of truth and bluff mixed together, she steered her son through Continental art galleries and concert halls and dragged him to toga parties in posh resorts. As a boy, he met Enrico Caruso, Cosima Wagner, Lillian Russell, Theda Bara, and Aleister Crowley.

Periodically he went home and lived with his beloved adoptive father, Solomon Sturges, a stockbroker in Chicago; the stable environment exerted a strong appeal. The elder Sturges bankrolled his wife's sojourns until their increasing length made it clear that the marriage was a sham. Solomon and Preston remained close all their lives, whereas Preston's biological father, a man named Edmund Biden, came calling only after his son was rich and famous.

The young man's schooling was irregular and stopped short of college. He dabbled in inventing and songwriting and ran his mother's company from New York for several years, until she came back and claimed it. His first wife walked out on him, ending their marriage. After appendicitis nearly killed him at age thirty, he looked in the mirror and saw a failure in the making.

Shortly afterward a hostile girlfriend helped him to discover his métier. When she announced that she was writing a play to expose him as a swaggering oaf, he vowed he would write a better one. "And what's more," he told her, "my play will be produced first and will run longer." He won his bet, though the play didn't run all that long. But his second effort, *Strictly Dishonorable*, stayed on Broadway for more than a year. When subsequent plays flopped, he moved to Hollywood, a seller's market for bright dialogue. There he quickly mastered the rest of the screenwriter's craft, including a sense of pacing that allowed his plots to make giddy turns without leaving the audience behind.

JAMES Agee, in a favorable review of *Hail the Conquering Hero*, was among those who diagnosed a divided psyche in Sturges, asserting that it was reflected in his work. The "mastering object" of Sturges's comedies, Agee wrote, was to

sail as steep into the wind as possible without for an instant incurring the disaster of becoming seriously, wholly acceptable as art. They seem to me, in-

deed, in much of their twisting, the elaborately counterpointed image of a neurosis. It is an especially interesting neurosis . . . the definitive expression of this country at present—the strangehold wedlock of the American female tradition of “culture,” the male tradition of “success.”

Brian Henderson, the film professor who has edited both volumes of screenplays, takes issue with this—and rightly so. Like many other Americans during the Depression, Sturges was fascinated by somersaults of fortune, which figure in several of his plots: in *Easy Living*, *The Great McGinty*, *Christmas in July*, *The Palm Beach Story*, and *Hail the Conquering Hero*. He rubbed shoulders with tycoons and was especially good at caricaturing the vacuous American millionaire-by-inheritance. But his was not the career of a trimmer. He “persisted with *The Great Moment*,” Henderson writes, “even though it cost him the enmity of his studio [Paramount] and finally undid him, simply because he believed in the project.”

In *Sullivan's Travels*, which confronts the tension between art and commerce, the eponymous director-hero, who hankers after social significance à la Frank Capra, is an object of Horatian satire. In the end Sullivan decides to stick with what he does best, even if it happens to be gratifyingly lucrative, after an audience of convicts watching a Disney cartoon reminds him of the value of laughter. Obviously the film pleads for Sturges's own inclinations. But it's hard to square this good-natured work with the notion that its creator shrank neurotically from gravitas.

What is bothersome about his movies is that too often—pressed for time and with an eye on the groundlings—Sturges suspended the verbal fun in favor of formulaic slapstick. His masterpiece, *The Lady Eve*, is blemished by all the trippings, beanings, and food-spatterings inflicted on Henry Fonda. Sturges moaned when the Paramount bosses wrested *The Great Moment* away from him and “cut [it] for comedy.” But he had played into their hands by larding the story with a rampage in a bottle shop, a plunge through a glass window, and multiple pratfalls.

The intricate version of that film which Sturges approved is lost, but the simplified studio release is out on video. The script's inclusion in *Four More Screenplays* allows readers to visualize what

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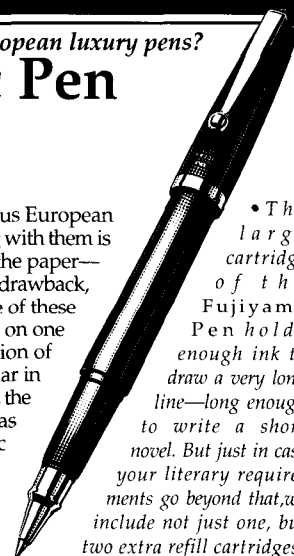
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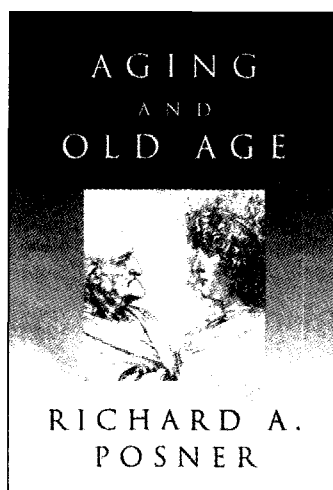
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Sturges had in mind and then rent the video and see what a hash Paramount made of it. But comparing other scripts with their filmed incarnations reveals movement toward perfection. In *The Lady Eve*, for example, Stanwyck's anticipation of her revenge on Fonda improves from "I need him like Dempsey needed Firpo" on the page to "I need him like the axe needs the turkey" on the screen.

There is also the pleasure of watching written instructions spring to life. Again in *The Lady Eve*, just after Stanwyck and Fonda marry, she exacts her revenge by making up and flaunting a promiscuous past. She ran off with her first husband at sixteen, she claims. This was Angus, "a groom on Father's estate." Fonda's reaction line is "A groom!"—which Sturges wanted him to say "as if he had swallowed vitriol." To hear Fonda croak the word "groom" is to witness a lovely coupling of intention with execution.

THE culture Sturges was force-fed as a boy came to fruition in *Unfaithfully Yours*, a Juvenalian satire about a maestro (Harrison) whose fantasies of dealing with his allegedly unfaithful wife (Linda Darnell) jibe with the various musical war-horses he conducts. The movie flopped, in part because of a ghastly coincidence. In the dominant fantasy sequence Harrison murders Darnell. Before the film opened, Harrison's real-life girlfriend, the actress Carole Landis, killed herself. Twentieth Century-Fox lost confidence in *Unfaithfully Yours*; the reviews were mixed; and it failed to find an audience.

Between Paramount and Fox, Sturges had gone into partnership with Howard Hughes—a disaster that produced only one movie, the so-so *Sin of Harold Diddlebock*. According to Henderson, *Diddlebock* is still tied up in Hughes's estate and thus is unavailable for reprinting.

Beginning in 1940 Sturges squandered much of his energy on *The Players*, a restaurant he designed, managed, and poured a fortune into. He seemed to need this white elephant as a status symbol, as if the Oscar and the kudos and the buckets of money weren't enough. He made another film for Fox, a Betty Grable vehicle called *The Beautiful Blonde From Bashful Bend*. Its god-awfulness ended his American career. Abroad, he directed one last time—*The French They Are a Funny Race*, in dual French and English

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versions. It, too, was a clinker. By now he was drinking hard and almost broke; friends noticed him pocketing rolls from his lunch tray for the next morning's breakfast. In one of the last photographs taken of him, he looks a decade older than his sixty years.

Sturges died of a heart attack in 1959, while working on his autobiography in a New York hotel room. He was survived

by his fourth wife and their two young sons, and a son from his third marriage. Money had gotten so scarce that he hadn't been able to join his new family in California since their return from Europe a year and a half ahead of him. But there's no need to dwell on his grim end. Preserved on videocassette and in these two books of screenplays, the Sturges legacy is secure. ☼

BRIEF REVIEWS



No Intermissions

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Agnes de Mille (1906–1993) has been described as “perhaps the best dancer ever to write and the best writer ever to dance.” As a choreographer, “she created new ways of seeing and thinking about dance.” And “she brought fresh air into ballet and irrevocably changed dance on the Broadway stage” with her work in *Oklahoma*, which converted dance from the peripheral ornament of a musical show to an integral part of the action. As a writer of elegant, witty, sometimes impassioned memoirs, she exercised the autobiographer's traditional right to tell things her way. Practically speaking, she condensed the trivial, minimized the embarrassing (unless it could be turned into comedy), and omitted what she preferred not to remember. Ms. Easton's biography follows De Mille regarding the trivial and, to some extent, the embarrassing, but what the dancer chose not to remember has been thoroughly researched and proves thoroughly interesting. Her mother, the daughter of Henry George of the single-tax theory, was a more possessive and misguided parent than De Mille ever admitted, and her uncle Cecil, the director of flamboyant Hollywood epics, a source of unprovoked resentment. Ms. Easton's analysis of the content of De

Mille's ballets is intelligent, her use of quotation adroit. Her biography can only add to De Mille's posthumous stature as a major contributor to dance in America. De Mille could be hell to work with, but she was a grandly amusing woman and a wonder of accomplishment.

Don't Die Before You're Dead

by Yevgeny Yevtushenko.
Random House,
415 pages, \$25.00.

Mr. Yevtushenko's exciting novel about the 1991 attempt to overthrow Mikhail Gorbachev's government puts the reader right on the barricades along with the author. It throws together personal observation, real and imaginary characters, actual and fictional events, satire and tragedy, past and present, prose and poetry. The fictional characters include an honest, and therefore disaffected, policeman, an émigrée poet returned from Paris, and a former soccer star fallen into drunken decay. The real characters, with the exception of Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, and the author, are given generic names such as “the Crystal-Clear Communist” and “the Great Degustator.” The fictional characters permit the author to portray aspects of Soviet society such as the expatriate literary colony in Paris and the future of superannuated athletes. The soccer player provides some superb



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comedy—a ludicrous teenage drinking party and a tournament in which a team of creaky but wily veterans tries to lose at least one game to its generous but inept local hosts. The dazzling variety of effects in Mr. Yevtushenko's semi-history winds down with a wistful poem, "Good-bye Our Red Flag," and a postscript denouncing the war in Chechnya: "Now Russia is nowhere—between the past and the future. Nevertheless that is better than ending up behind the barbed wire of the past. Maturity is measured by the number of lost illusions."

The Octopus's Garden

by Cindy Lee Van Dover.
Addison-Wesley, 183 pages,
\$20.00.

Ms. Van Dover is an oceanographer and a former pilot of *Alvin*, a deep-sea submersible used to explore the ocean floor, once thought to be lifeless, now known to harbor a variety of organisms. At 9,000 to 12,000 feet below the surface strange creatures cluster around hydrothermal vents and subsist on chemicals extracted from the erupting water. The vents sometimes create chimneys that can collapse at a touch, which makes maneuvering *Alvin* a delicate matter, and there is a constant possibility of landslides and earthquakes. The author describes this bizarre underwater world with a mixture of almost lyrical visual pleasure and a run of technical terms to mind-boggle the uninitiated. She also reports some unnerving details: deepwater shrimp are disgustingly inedible, and *Alvin*, which is the size of two bathtubs, carries three people on its nine-hour hitches.

The Tunnel: The Underground Homeless of New York City

by Margaret Morton.
Yale, 160 pages, \$45.00/\$20.00.

In the 1970s a two-and-a-half-mile railroad tunnel along New York's Hudson River frontage was abandoned. By 1991 more than fifty otherwise homeless people were living in that tunnel, where they had contrived the rough equivalent of a hunting and gathering society, self-supporting and unobtrusive. Amtrak, proposing to reactivate the tunnel, wanted them

ousted. Before that happened, Ms. Morton managed to photograph the dwellings in the tunnel—which ranged from a bed-roll on a ledge to rooms with furniture, stoves, bric-a-brac, and pets—and to interview some of the inhabitants. The interviews that accompany her striking photographs reveal stories of hard luck, unhappy marriage, poor judgment, and substance abuse, but they also reveal the impressive amount of energy, ingenuity, and plain grit required of loners who are surviving outside orthodox society. The tunnel people may not be sober nine-to-five types, but they are neither lazy nor stupid. They deserve respect as well as sympathy.

The Moor's Last Sigh

by Salman Rushdie.
Pantheon, 448 pages,
\$28.00.

Mr. Rushdie's new novel is so intricate, so multi-faceted, and so fast-moving that it keeps the reader dizzily enthralled from beginning to end. It may also add a Hindu curse to the Islamic price on the author's head, for beneath the surface glitter of the tale lies a protest against the rise of chauvinistic Hindu fundamentalism and the dissolution of a once tolerant and flexible culture. The Moor of the title, who has nothing to do with Othello, is Moraes Zogoiby, the story's narrator. He is the last male survivor of two European families that flourished for centuries in the spice trade of the Malabar Coast. The Portuguese Da Gamas claim illegitimate descent from the great Vasco—improbably. The Jewish Zogoibys are suspected of descent, also illegitimate and improbable, from Boabdil, the last Sultan of Moorish Spain. The Da Gamas thrive on art, violence, and personal eccentricities of which walking a stuffed dog on a leash is a mild example. The Zogoibys remain largely offstage, but the activities of Moraes's father, Abraham, indicate a talent for finance, political intrigue, revenge, and dissimulation. The characters speak with a wild, crackling eloquence; comic, horrible, and fantastic events merge and conflict; and the history of modern India rumbles in the background. In addition to everything else, the work is enormously entertaining.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams



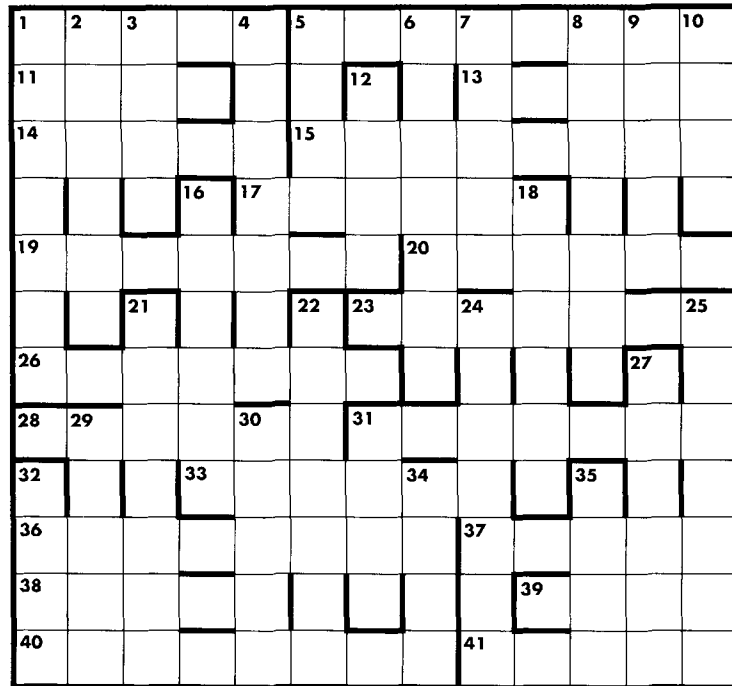
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Blankety-Blank

Every clue with a blank is missing an element necessary to its solution (though the missing element contributes nothing to the clue's superficial sense). Each blank represents a single word, and the blanked-out words are members of a set that can be found in many common reference books. Answers include six capitalized words and rather uncommon terms at nos. 2, 18, and 22 Down.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 112.



Across

1. Reason soldier wears some hair cut short (5)
5. Take the shine off poor ____ husband's face (8)
11. Computerized money machine contains nothing ____ (4)
13. Couple of tomatoes behind ____ navy bean (5)
14. Three-quarters of mile west of an Italian town (5)
15. Dilapidated hotel in "X" broadcast lasting hours (8)
17. Facial cleansers in heaps outside of emergency room (6)
19. Paving material for New ____ St. (7)
20. Holy crew mostly dressed in blue (6)
23. *Help!* including ____ McCartney's first fallacy (7)
26. Drunk ____ has Rex curtailed and neutered (7)
28. Soprano breaking proper small glass objects (6)
31. Row around ____ getting more sloshed (7)

33. German pronoun grasped by listener is not so tough (6)
36. The guy nets ____ 1000 in local sports event (8) (*two words*)
37. One ____ performing with man on a wheel (5)
38. Take guns from ____ NRA in disarray (5)
39. Actor Jacques ____ missing the musical note (4)
40. Slowly develops tales about ____ making a comeback (8)
41. Chief of Comanches pursues nomadic ____ Native American (5)

Down

1. Dance ____ embracing first of admirers (7)
2. Lazy bum is too excited at first (6)
3. First prize for returning dead piece of wood (4)
4. Saracen ____ regiment includes horseman? (7)
5. Brought up Old Testament ____ preposition (4)

6. Rocky ____ commits a football infraction (7) (*two words*)
7. Works up one item taken back for lack of payment (5)
8. "Naturally get hit," Erin cracked (7)
9. Ripped off a thing like a scarf (5)
10. Hot single: "Get Sharp" (4)
12. Talent ____ mostly seen around north (4)
16. Smile when you say this bit of trochee's erroneous (6)
18. Rock ____ when in barrier-breaking jet (6)
21. Marks from tee in ____ back of links (7)
22. Coming forth in heraldry sets Jan apart (7)
24. Seasoning scattered ____ around Rhode Island (7)
25. Terribly ____ stupid (7)
27. Regarding speck of dust far off in space (6)
29. ____ Northeastern French river (5)
30. Moving ____ molten rock (5)
31. Newsmagazine with back issue (4)
32. Tough loveless criminal?! (4)
34. Touches beheaded fish (4)
35. Sanction pitching a fit (4)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 745 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.

IMPROVISATION

by J. E. Lighter

Among the Muckamucks

THE quadrennial national political season officially gets under way with the New Hampshire primary this month, and it will surely bring reminders of how quickly and easily derisive terms for the politically powerful and self-important tend to arise. The front-runners out of New Hampshire will be seeking contributions from *fat cats* (a political term going back to the 1920s, and a pre-Swing Era example of *cat* meaning "person") and endorsements from political *bigwigs*. *Bigwig* began in metonymy (the use of a word as a name for something else, with which it is associated), doubtless prompted by the fashionable oversized perukes sported by British aristocrats in the seventeenth century and later. (Big wigs—some might call them *rugs* today—became traditional on the heads of English jurists before 1700, and they are still going strong.)

In politics or out, no *bigwig* wants to be referred to as a *high* (or *big*) *muckamuck* (or *muckymuck* or *mucketymuck*). Nobody likes muck, but there is none in *muckamuck*'s origin: among the Nootka of Vancouver Island *mak(a)mak* means "food," and in the Chinook jargon of traders in the Northwest *hayo makamak* meant "lots to eat." Consider the superficial resemblance of *hayo* to "high." Chinook-speakers offering guests a lavish meal on windy frontier coasts might be thought of as the *bigwigs* of local society. In surfer idiom a synonymous term would be *big kahunas*, from the native Hawaiian word for an island priest, sorcerer, or healer.

The remarkable *mugwump*, which attained a high profile in the Cleveland-Blaine presidential race of 1884, isn't usually associated with the meaning "political grandee," but in fact that's how it started out. The *New York Sun* had ridiculed some prominent Republicans for bolting the party to support Grover Cleveland: the phrase used was "the

Little *Mugwumps*"; a month later Thomas Nast drew a *mugwump* cartoon for *Harper's Weekly*. *Mugwump* thus became a term for a political turncoat. Originally, though, *mugwump* was a word roughly equivalent to *big-*

"his mug's on one side of the fence and his wump's on the other"—is spurious.

And then there's *big enchilada*—one of the newest *bigwig* terms. On Richard Nixon's White House tape of March 27, 1973, the presidential aide John Erlichman can be heard calling Attorney General John Mitchell "the *big enchilada*"—the biggest *bigwig* yet linked by investigators to the mess of scandals known as Watergate. Four years later, after the tapes had made *big enchilada* a slang fixture, Erlichman, an enchilada aficionado, told William Safire that he had cooked up the new meaning himself. Had the tape not been running, our food-allusive slang for *big shot* might still be limited to *big cheese*. *Big cheese* preceded *big shot* itself, which burst onto the scene in the 1920s, frequently in discussions of crime. Conjecture is inevitable: *big shot* may have been based on *big gun*, with a little help from the once popular *big noise*. Erlichman mused that he might as easily have called Mitchell "the *big fish*," a metaphor from at least the 1830s which probably made its debut in American literature in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Redskins* (1846). Unlike a *big cheese*, a *big fish* (most often some kind of ring-leader) is usually somebody to be *hooked* by law-enforcement officials rather than to be envied for his power and success.

Doing the hooking could be *the man*—a term for anybody in authority, male or female, from the cop on the beat all the way up. This is an idiom long applied in the South to any man whose role is obvious in conversational context ("The washing machine's on the blink again." "Better not fool with it—call *the man*"). The civil-rights movement broadcast the specific sense "policeman." *The Man* (usually capitalized) soon personified "the System," especially as conceived in neo-Marxist doctrine.



*Investigations of slang
by the editor of the
Random House Historical Dictionary
of American Slang*

wig. In the Algonquian dialect of the Natick Indians of Massachusetts, *mugquomp* meant "great man." The Puritan missionary John Eliot even used it for the English words "duke" and "centurion" in his 1661–1663 translation of the Bible into Algonquian, the first Bible published in the Colonies. The popular etymology of *mugwump*—which explains the word by reference to the phrase

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center of gravity handled it with nary a problem. Our rivals, following in their Chevy Blazer, fared less well. So we drove on, safe for the moment, but keenly aware that other adventures might await us down the road. Join our exploits. Pop in for a test-drive at your Subaru dealer or call 1-800-WANT-AWD.

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